
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

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Labor Unionism In American Agriculture



Bulletin No. 836

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE, WASHINGTON : 1945

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office
Washington 25, D. C. - Price cents

Letter of Transmittal

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR,
BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS,
Washington, June 15, 1945.

THE SECRETARY OF LABOR :

I have the honor to transmit herewith a report on the development of unionism in agriculture in the United States. The report, which is the result of exhaustive research, brings together hitherto scattered material much of which was previously not available. It traces the changing character of agriculture in this country and the conditions that have given rise to labor unrest. Altogether, it is a valuable and graphic study showing the origins, development, problems, and accomplishments of unionism among farm workers in various parts of the United States.

The report was prepared by Stuart Jamieson, Lecturer in Economics at the University of British Columbia. Any expressions of opinion are those of the author and are not necessarily shared by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

A. F. HINRICHS, *Acting Commissioner.*

HON. FRANCES PERKINS,
Secretary of Labor.

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Labor Unionism In American Agriculture

CHAPTER I.—Introduction

A lengthy study of labor unionism in American agriculture might appear to be "much ado about nothing." The very concept of organization among farm workers seems anachronistic to many persons. College textbooks on labor problems dismiss the subject in summary fashion, if they mention it at all. Farming customarily receives brief notice as a special type of economic enterprise which remains singularly free from unionism, strikes, class conflict, and other manifestations of the labor troubles that nonagricultural industries have been experiencing for many decades.

As a matter of fact, hired farm workers numbering in the hundreds of thousands have participated in literally hundreds of strikes throughout the Nation in the past five or six decades. Almost every State in the Union has experienced at least one farm-labor strike at one time or another. By far the majority of such outbreaks occurred during the 1930's.

It is questionable whether these occurrences should be considered a "labor movement" in the full sense of the term. Labor unions and strikes in American agriculture for the most part have been small, sporadic, and scattered. They seem insignificant in comparison with the activities of organized labor in other industries, and the more important urban trade-unions during most of their history have had little to do with farm workers. On the other hand, at least three concerted attempts have been made at different times to unionize agricultural labor in the United States on a nation-wide scale. On each occasion there was sufficient continuity in philosophy, tactics, and organizing personnel to constitute a "movement." In any case, the fact that farm workers in many areas did organize, and strike, is itself significant, for it indicates a divergence of actual conditions from the popular conceptions regarding the nature of farm work.

This report endeavors both to record the history of farm labor unions and strikes in the United States, and to analyze them functionally in time and place. The matters that always remain uppermost are the combinations of circumstances that gave rise to organized labor-employer conflicts in agriculture; the types of farming and the changes in farm structure and labor relations that tended to generate such conflict; the issues over which the labor disputes on farms occurred, and the tactics of group pressure and combat employed by the contending parties; the reactions of nominally neutral or disinterested groups in rural communities to farm labor unions and strikes, and the degree to which their reactions were influenced or governed by economic interest, social status, cultural tradition, or politico-legal considerations.

This report presents a general picture of the history of agricultural unionism in the United States, and a more detailed analysis of its evolution in certain States and regions. The first three chapters give a brief chronological sketch of farm-labor unions and strikes as they developed for brief periods of time in scattered areas, showing the attempts to organize agricultural and allied workers into international unions affiliated with two main organized federations, the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and evaluating some of the major conditioning factors common to the different agricultural areas of the United States that experienced labor agitation and strikes.

In the remainder of the report farm-labor unionism is examined in more detail in its diverse regional contexts. Unions and strikes have been classified as far as possible according to the areas in which they occurred, in so far as regions and States can be differentiated by distinct crop industries or types of agricultural labor employed. An attempt has been made in each case to analyze the relationships between farm-labor movements and the economic and social structures of the crop areas in which they occurred.

The history and nature of the farm-labor movement in the United States have been difficult to trace because of the exceedingly complex nature of the subject matter, much of which has been inadequately documented. Statistical estimates regarding number and frequency of strikes, dates on which they occurred, numbers of workers participating, issues raised, and crops affected are likely to be far from accurate or conclusive, and must allow for a wide margin of error. Agricultural laborers as an occupational group in many areas were extremely migratory and casual in their employment relations, making it almost impossible to distinguish clearly between employed and unemployed. Unskilled agricultural work for the most part was accessible to almost anyone, labor recruiting and hiring were haphazard, and turn-over was high. The number employed for brief periods in any one seasonal crop area generally fluctuated widely from day to day. The personnel at the same time was changing continually, owing to simultaneous hiring and voluntary quitting.

For these reasons clear definitions, let alone accurate statistical estimates, are difficult to achieve. When a succession of walk-outs involved several thousand workers in one crop harvest and encompassed several counties and many separate localities, did it constitute one strike or several? Again, when a small strike began in one crop and in a short time spread to thousands of workers in several crops within one county or growing area, did this situation represent one strike or several?

Definition would be immaterial if accurate estimates could be made of the total numbers involved. This, however, raises even more formidable difficulties. The demand for labor in any crop area during a brief harvest period might have been fairly definite in terms of total man-hours, but it could be extremely elastic in terms of the number of persons employed for various lengths of time. The potential supply also varied considerably. Such marginal labor groups as women, children and aged, unemployed, relief clients, and transients from other States, all supplemented the "usual" seasonal farm workers employed in an area. In a strike situation, which of these and how many of them should be included among the unemployed, and which among the strikers?

The problem is complicated further by the extreme mobility of agricultural laborers. A number of those made temporarily jobless by a strike

in one locality or crop could have migrated to nearby areas and found work in the same or other crops. Not infrequently such persons participated in further strikes before the first one was settled, so that a summation of the number affected at any one time could lead to duplication and overestimates.

Another formidable obstacle to thorough and accurate analysis lies in the extreme paucity of reliable sources regarding farm-labor organizations and their activities. The fact that relatively few people are even aware that unions in agriculture ever existed is a good indication that little has been known or written about them. A few spectacularly large and violent strikes in farm areas at one time or another have received wide publicity in metropolitan newspapers and have become the subject of much investigation. Various tabulations of agricultural strikes and numbers of participants have been compiled by such agencies as the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U. S. Department of Labor, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, and the California Bureau of Labor Statistics and other State labor departments. Their estimates and tabulations tend to vary widely because in compiling their data they have had to depend sometimes upon unreliable news accounts and differing reports from local authorities, participants, and spectators. Few agricultural-labor strikes have been investigated thoroughly at first hand by official fact-finding bodies or by careful observers.

An invaluable source of information for the present study has been the published hearings and reports of the Subcommittee of the U. S. Senate Committee on Education and Labor, studying "Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor" in California's agriculture. These volumes contain many special studies and reports by government agencies, scholars, experts, and others regarding the agricultural background of farm-labor problems in that State. Official investigators and representative participants from the ranks of employers, employees, and officers of the law, describe in detail several of the more important labor organizations and strikes at hearings held by the subcommittee.

To obtain data regarding the farm-labor movement in States other than California, the writer has had to rely almost completely upon personal interviews with participants and observers—union organizers and members, employers and their representatives, police, sheriffs and deputies, and local government officials and administrators. Data obtained from these sources were compared and contrasted, and supplemented with accounts from local newspapers as well as various labor and employer journals. These findings were checked with official reports by public fact-finding agencies where available.

Because of the fragmentary nature of the data, the portrayal of farm-labor unions and strikes in following chapters is not so well balanced as would be desired. Some incidents are treated perhaps in greater detail than their relative importance would require, simply because the sources were unusually full. Other important developments have had to be treated much too briefly because adequate information was lacking. Numerous lengthy quotations from and references to newspaper accounts and verbal testimony have been included, not so much for their factual accuracy as for the expression of significant attitudes by various groups involved in labor disputes. In so far as attitudes express a propensity to act, such accounts shed an illuminating light on the causes of strikes and the various patterns of labor-employer conflict that emerged in different areas.

CHAPTER II.—Agricultural Worker and Labor Unionism

The Family Farm and the Farm Hand

“Q. * * * Do many agricultural laborers belong to organizations in which they undertake to regulate the hours of labor?”

“A. No, sir. Of course, farmers usually work for themselves; they go to the field, take hold and labor; they are on very good terms with their help. Very many of these laborers are members of the farmers' organizations.”¹

The above picture of labor relationships on the land is traditional. In popular social theory, farm workers have occupied a special position that differentiated them sharply from other occupational groups. With few exceptions, labor problems and “class conflict” have not been perceived to be part of the rural scene.

This conception derives from the nature of farming itself. Traditionally a “way of life” as well as an economic undertaking, the farm in theory has been operated upon principles quite different from those governing other industrial and commercial enterprises. The conviction has long been prevalent that the farm owner-operator, together with his family, is or should be the one who performs most of the labor involved. The traditional “American dream” envisaged a pattern of land settlement in which the “family farm” would be the basic unit of the Nation's agriculture. In Congressional debate at the time the Homestead Act was being passed, a Representative from Indiana declared:

Instead of baronial possessions, let us facilitate the increase of independent homesteads. Let us keep the plow in the hands of the owner. Every new home that is established, an independent possessor of which cultivates his own freehold, is establishing a new republic within the old, and adding a new and strong pillar to the edifice of the state.²

The use of hired laborers evolved as a common adjunct where family farms became less diversified, with the growing of crops for sale in urban markets as well as for use by the operator's family. “By the outbreak of the American Revolution,” according to Dr. Paul S. Taylor, “the institution of the farm wage worker who lived with the family and was paid by the month had appeared, and by 1800 had become general.” The number grew as farms themselves multiplied in the process of western expansion.

Farm wage workers did not, however, become a *class*. In their origins they were mainly sons of other farmers, and their social status differed little from that of unpaid family laborers and their employers. In the popular conception the “farm worker” became scarcely distinguishable from the “working farmer.” The latter rarely maintained more than one “hired man.” Employer-employee relationships were close, personal, and stable. Industrial labor problems arising from exploitation and insecurity, class division, and conflict of group interests were inconceivable. Farmer and farm hand together performed similar jobs the year round, ate at the

¹Statement of Honorable Joseph H. Brigham, Assistant Secretary of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, before the U. S. Industrial Commission, 1901.

²Quoted from Paul S. Taylor: *The Place of Agricultural Labor in Society*. Paper at Twelfth Annual Meeting, Western Farm Economics Association, June 15, 1939. This chapter draws liberally upon that paper. Also, testimony by Dr. Taylor published in Hearings of the Subcommittee of the Committee on Education and Labor, U. S. Senate, 76th Cong., 2d sess. (hereafter referred to as the “La Follette Committee”), Part 47 (p. 17280).

same table, and had major interests in common. If the farm hand was "exploited," in terms of long hours and low wages, so was his farmer employer. The security and material welfare of both rested almost equally on the continued and successful functioning of the farm as a "going concern," and, in the final analysis, the farm laborer's position was made as secure as the farm employer's by his well-nigh equal social status in the community. This position is described by E. Chapman in his *New England Village Life*:

The self-respecting [hired man] was a recognized and respected member of the neighborhood. His was the independence of a free citizen as really as that of his employer * * *. If his wages were small, the scale of living about him was a simple one * * *. The employer worked beside his man.³

Even more important than family origins and social status in preventing farm workers from becoming a class were their opportunities to rise by their own individual efforts. During most of the nineteenth century there was a constant outlet for hired men who could push west and acquire new farms for themselves. Owner-employers at the same time were constantly retiring or shifting to other vocations, and their farms were made available for renting to tenants or for selling on time payments. Occupational climbing from wage earner to owner was facilitated by general industrial expansion, which increased the markets for agricultural produce and opened opportunities to those who chose to leave their farms, as well as to those who bought them. In this way were built the steps of a process which came to be known as the "agricultural ladder." This was described by the U. S. Industrial Commission in 1911:

Farm labor, in a large and true sense, is the work of the farmer, the tenant, the crop sharer, and the laborer hired for wages. These forms of effort are inextricably involved, the farm laborer of one year being the farm owner of another, and the sons of farm owners laborers temporarily, tenants later, and ultimately proprietors. In this country land titles are not tied up by primogeniture nor agricultural classes held by caste to semi-serfdom of social and industrial conditions. It is impossible to chain an American to a life service in any industrial class.⁴

Economic security and fluidity of class lines for all farm occupational groups—laborer, tenant, and owner—were maintained, finally, by general business expansion. The farmer appeared still less to be a member of a fixed class, as there was always, apparently, the alternative avenue of escape to the city if and when the agricultural ladder became no longer scaleable. As a matter of historical fact, the majority took this road, as evidenced by the continuous migrations to the cities, which in time transformed the United States from a predominantly agricultural to a primarily urban, industrial nation. Periodic complaints of farm-labor shortages and rural depopulation were met with the argument that the country, to retain its people, must raise its working and living standards to a level of advantage that could compete with the city.

Deviations from the Family Farm

The family farm with its hired man became the general pattern of land settlement throughout most of the United States and was widely accepted as the ideal relationship for American agriculture. For several decades, however, there have been numerous indications that in certain areas inde-

³Paul S. Taylor: *The Place of Agricultural Labor in Society*.

pendent proprietors of small diversified farms were losing ground literally and figuratively, and where family farming was replaced by other forms of agricultural enterprise, the hired labor was no longer of the farm-hand variety.

Huge enterprises in some types of agriculture, as in many urban industries, proved more profitable than diversified farming in small units. Certain land areas were found particularly adaptable to "industrialized" methods of production. Large-scale enterprises were able to produce some crops more cheaply than could small family farms, by subdividing productive processes and simplifying each job, by mechanizing operations, and hiring labor in groups rather than as individuals, in brief, by functioning on a "mass production" basis. Farms operating on these principles became most numerous in the cultivation of intensive cash crops for sale in distant urban markets. The existence of such agricultural enterprises in America was widely recognized by the 1930's. Their roots, however, reached back to the 1870's and earlier in some regions, and the special labor problems they generated were beginning to make their appearance late in the nineteenth century.

The Old South was perhaps unique in the United States as one rural economy in which the "agricultural ladder" had never been accepted as a workable social ideal. Concentration of land ownership in large plantation units depending upon masses of slave labor was an almost complete antithesis of the family farm, and the conflict between these two standards of land settlement played no small role as an issue in the Civil War. Emancipation created one of America's first serious farm-labor problems. Large numbers of free and propertyless workers had to be reabsorbed into a financially bankrupt plantation economy. As tenants and sharecroppers they had a standard of living and an economic security substantially below that of the farm hand and the industrial laborer. An increase in numbers of agricultural workers paralleled a steadily growing rate of tenancy in the South. By 1900 this region had more than half of all farm laborers in the United States.⁴

Variants of the plantation, employing a type of farm labor which differed rather sharply from the hired-man ideal, developed in other regions during the latter part of the nineteenth century. With rapid expansion of trade and industry, growth in city populations, rise in land values, and improvements in transportation and communication, agriculture in some sections of the North Atlantic States grew away from diversified family farming. Landowners in increasing numbers specialized in intensively cultivated truck vegetables, orchard fruits, berries, tobacco, and other miscellaneous farm products. Completion of a transcontinental railway system developed a similar type of agriculture concentrated in larger and more heavily capitalized farm units in California and the Northwest. Highly mechanized, large-scale "bonanza" farms in North Dakota, eastern Washington, and Oregon during the late seventies and eighties represented a factory method of organization adapted to the production of wheat. Cattle ranching in the southwestern plains during this period also became a highly centralized system of large-scale production, characterized by huge land holdings controlled by absentee corporations.⁴

Large farming enterprises in each of these distinct crop regions experienced labor problems of a type never faced by family farms. An industrial

⁴LaWanda Cox: *Agricultural Labor in the United States 1865-1900*. Ph. D. Thesis in History, University of California, Berkeley, Calif., December 1941 (p. 12).

structure of operations when adapted to agriculture tended to bring a correspondingly industrialized pattern of labor relations. The scale of operations alone, beyond the capacities of the farm owner supplemented by his family and hired man, widened the social distance and inequality of status between employer and employee. Farming of this type was a business run for profit rather than a "way of life," and labor relationships became commercialized and impersonal. The gulf was widened even more where the land, as in cattle ranching and wheat farming, became absentee-owned and management-operated. Agricultural laborers in such cases were often hired in gangs or crews to perform standardized or repetitive work under the supervision of foremen or bosses, as in a factory. The farm owner no longer worked at the side of his men. Contrasts rather than similarities in social background between farm operators and farm laborers became obvious where (as in sections of California, Texas, and the North Atlantic), newly arrived immigrant workers were recruited in large numbers. The farm laborer was no longer "like one of the family," nor did he eat at the same table as his employer; on the cattle ranch and the "bonanza" wheat farm he was boarded and lodged as one among many of his kind in dormitories or "bunk houses." On large farms in California and the Northwest he usually had to provide his own food from the wages he earned.

The farm laborer's security and the continuity of his relationship to his employer and to the land on which he worked were disrupted even more in certain crop areas characterized by extreme seasonality of employment and consequent high labor mobility. Specialized large-scale farming, unlike most urban industry, is not a continuous interrelated process of simultaneous input and output. Natural factors govern the periods of planting, cultivating, growing, and harvesting. On the other hand, the work is not staggered over a variety of crops maturing at different months, as it is on the diversified family farm. The large farm specializing in one or a few crops tends to become vitally dependent upon large numbers of seasonal laborers required for short periods of time each year for cultivating and particularly for harvesting. Small farms also in some cases specialized in certain produce, and their labor relations came to resemble those of the large farms. Because limited areas, concentrating in special crops which ripened at different periods, were scattered over wide regions, many seasonal workers were forced to migrate continually in order to find work at a succession of short planting and harvesting jobs.

Labor-employer conflict was always latent and often overt in the limited areas in which these relationships developed. The absentee owner and hired manager of a large agricultural enterprise tended to view the wages of labor primarily as a cost which should be kept to the minimum in order to attain maximum profitability from the land. This was the case particularly when other farm costs—rent, machinery, interest on invested capital, fertilizer, and other necessities—were fixed by contract or by "administered prices," so that wages constituted almost the sole variable cost.

The attitudes of seasonal wage laborers to their employers on large farms were no longer like those of the farm hand. Their material welfare could not be considered inseparably linked to that of the owner in a situation in which it was impossible for most of them to know him personally, much less to work with him in the fields. Wage levels and conditions of employment served as a focus for conflicts of group interests. The hired laborers, and in many cases the tenants, had lost as individuals the protec-

tion of an economic position and social status which a personal relationship with their employers or landlords once afforded. At the same time the large scale of operations and the heavier capital investments required for successful farming of several crops impressed upon certain groups of hired laborers a consciousness of their inability to rise to a position of owner or operator. As members of a more or less fixed class in some regions, they sought alternative means of self-protection through banding together in unions to carry on collective bargaining with landowners and employers.

Labor Unrest and Large-Scale Farming

Labor unionism and strikes among agricultural workers were a relatively unimportant aspect of the broader labor movement in America until the 1930's. Collective action among farm workers was limited almost solely to areas characterized by large-scale farms specializing in one or a few crops and hiring laborers in groups rather than as individual workers. Sporadic local movements of many different types developed in widely separated regions during the nineteenth century. Propertyless wage earners frequently joined small farm owners and tenants in the same organizations; in other instances they were organized separately, often in opposing groups.

Agrarian movements in the Southern Cotton Belt during the latter part of the nineteenth century reflected the viewpoints of the small farm operator rather than the laborer. Concentration in land ownership had been general in the Old South since the beginning of colonization. The plantation system with its rigid caste structure based upon clearly defined racial division of labor inhibited collective action for social betterment on the part of labor and tenant groups. Slave revolts in pre-Civil-War days had been few, small, sporadic, and short-lived. Agrarian movements in opposition to the status quo developed after the Civil War among those elements not under the immediate domination of large planters—i.e., small hill farmers in the mountain regions of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee.⁶ These movements began, moreover, in the States (Texas and Oklahoma) which had the highest rates of tenancy but which were at the same time relatively free from the plantation system.

The major rural problem in the South and Southwest had long been the steadily growing indebtedness of farmers, as their livelihood became tied more closely to the production of cotton. This trend, punctuated by frequent depressions and conditions of drought, blight, and soil erosion, gave rise to continuous displacement of small owners and tenants. Here the problem of the farm operator became inseparable from that of the propertyless farm laborer, and both groups sometimes organized together for mutual self-protection.

Small farmer organizations endeavored to combat indebtedness, displacement, and concentration partly through a broad program of cooperative buying and selling. At the same time, they attempted to mobilize the disadvantaged small-farm operators and laborers and their allies into mass political pressure groups which could better their condition by agitating for favorable legislation. This program was characteristic of such organizations as the Agricultural Wheel, Farmers Alliance, Farm Labor

⁶See Olive Stone: *Agrarian Conflict in Alabama*. Ph. D. thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1939.

Union, and Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union. In contrast to most institutions in the South, these bodies usually cooperated with established labor unions and in some instances even made serious efforts to transcend the color line.⁷

Indigenous "tenant unions" developed in Oklahoma as an extension of the radical labor movement in prewar years. Many farm operators in newly settled regions of that State were well-nigh destitute homesteaders who lacked the capital necessary to become independent proprietors. The lines between owners, tenants, and laborers were exceedingly fluid, at a precariously low economic level. Agrarian organizations like the Oklahoma Renters Union and the Working Class Union of the World included elements from all three groups. In some instances, as in the "Green Corn Rebellion" in eastern Oklahoma, they employed tactics of direct action which were characteristic of labor unions rather than farmers' cooperatives.⁸ The small farm operator's position in many sections of the South was analogous to that of the town handicraftsman and proprietor during the Industrial Revolution; both waged a losing battle against large-scale production and concentration in ownership and control.

One of the first instances in agriculture of organized action in which hired laborers played the dominant role occurred in the livestock industry of the Southwest during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Cattle ranching was one of the first branches of agriculture to organize in large-scale units employing a specialized type of labor in crews supervised by hired managers and foremen. Range land became concentrated in the hands of large absentee owners at the expense of the small operators' and cowboy laborers' independent status. Class lines and issues were far from clear, however. Cowboys and small herd owners in some instances united for self-protection. Large ranchers, on the other hand, frequently hired cowboys as vigilantes to protect their property against the forays of independent operators. Latent labor unrest and class conflict were manifested by the prevalence of cattle rustling, gun-fighting, employer blacklists, and high labor turn-over. A dramatic climax was reached in the early eighties, when several hundred cowboys in the vicinity of Tascosa, in the Texas Panhandle, went on strike against seven large cattle-ranching corporations.

The first stable union of agricultural workers was organized among sheep shearers in the large-scale ranching areas of the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain regions. The present-day Sheep Shearers Union of North America, with headquarters in Butte, Mont., was preceded by several local and short-lived bodies, the earliest of which goes back as far as the 1890's.¹⁰

Certain singular features of their occupation provided sheep shearers a strategic bargaining position and, therefore, a rate of remuneration far above the ordinary level for agricultural workers. Wool is a perishable product, to shear which, without undue spoilage, requires considerable skill and accuracy gained from long training. The labor supply was for a long

⁷See Stone, *op. cit.* Also R. L. Hunt: *History of Farm Organizations in the South West*, College Station, Texas, 1925.

⁸See *Labor History of Oklahoma*, WPA Federal Writers' Project, Oklahoma City, 1939; also, Chapter XVI: *Early Farm Tenant and Labor Unions in Oklahoma* (p. 261).

⁹See Chapter XVI: *Beginnings of Labor Organization in Texas* (p. 257).

¹⁰This information was obtained from interview with C. B. Renk, secretary-treasurer of the Sheep Shearers Union in Butte, and from newspaper clippings and old membership cards which the union has on file. (See Chapter XIV.)

time limited not only by these requirements but also by transportation difficulties. The major sheep-raising areas, where shearing operations were performed and thus where shearers had to learn their trade, were sparsely populated and fairly inaccessible to large numbers of workers. Sheep shearers, as a small select group of itinerant skilled tradesmen, developed a decentralized type of union structure similar to that organized among such labor types as printers and mechanics. The collective-bargaining tactics of the Sheep Shearers Union rested upon manipulating the labor supply in limited areas during the shearing season, when sheep raisers were dependent upon incoming migratory shearers.

Labor unions did not develop among casual and migratory workers in other large-scale farming regions during the late nineteenth century, and strikes among this element were small and few. Sporadic local outbreaks occurred from time to time among "harvest stiff" in the Wheat Belt of the Middle West. Most of such incidents were spontaneous protests against the inadequate meals provided by some employers.¹¹ The few agricultural strikes in California during this period were far overshadowed by anti-Oriental riots, which radiated out to rural areas from San Francisco and other urban centers during periods of depression and unemployment.¹²

Large-scale industrial agricultural enterprises specializing in one or a few crops increased rapidly in scope and importance during the twentieth century under the stimuli of continued urban expansion, more complex market relationships, and notable technological improvements in transportation and in methods of production on the land. Intensive truck and fruit farming continued to expand in the North Atlantic and Pacific Coast States, and in the Carolinas, Florida, southern Texas, and the Great Lakes States. Rapid progress in irrigation opened up new tracts for growing intensive crops, as in the Imperial Valley of California, the Salt River Valley of Arizona, and the Yakima Valley in Washington. The growth of sugar-beet production in the Rocky Mountain and Great Lakes States and the westward movement of cotton to Oklahoma and the States along the Mexican border also brought new patterns of land operation.

Seasonal labor supplies for these concentrated crop areas came to be composed of many more or less distinct groups, differentiated by the various demands imposed upon them by each type of farming, their degree of mobility, the distances they travelled to work, and the number and duration of their jobs. The migratory agricultural laborers, defined broadly as those who have no residence and those who leave their residences for certain periods to follow seasonal farm jobs, did not generally constitute a compact and cohesive group moving from one community to another. Mercer G. Evans, Director of Personnel and Labor Relations for the Farm Security Administration, described this migratory group thus:

* * * In each area new recruits join the movement, and old ones drop out. Many workers mingle with the migratory stream only at one point, and then return to a home base. The influx of migrants into an area, also, usually represents an addition to a backlog of resident labor that is continuously available, but which is only used seasonally in agriculture.¹³

¹¹See Chapter XXII (p. 398).

¹²See Chapter IV.

¹³The Migration of Farm Labor. Paper presented by Mercer G. Evans before the Committee on Problems in Inter-State Migration at the National Conference of Social Work, Buffalo, N. Y., June 21, 1939 (p. 1).

Resident labor employed only for short periods seasonally is defined by some as casual in distinction to migratory.

Intermittent employment, small average annual earnings, and depressed standards of living branded the casual and migratory workers with a social status far below that of the farm hand. By the turn of the century, seasonal workers were recognized officially as a distinct occupational group which constituted a special problem in certain farm areas. To quote a report by the U. S. Industrial Commission in 1901—

* * * the annual inundation of grain fields in harvest time, hop fields in the picking season, fruit picking in districts of extensive market orchards, and similar harvest seasons requiring large numbers of hands for a short time, has a demoralizing effect on farm labor, reducing its efficiency in these lines. Such employments demand little skill, the requirements of each are simply and easily satisfied. They constitute a low order of farm labor, if worthy to be classed with it at all, and are excrescences upon its fair face.¹⁴

Obvious weaknesses in their bargaining position prevented such workers from unionizing effectively. Local organizations began to develop during the prewar decade in California, where the system of large-scale intensive agriculture was most thoroughly entrenched and the demand for seasonal labor was growing rapidly. Racial minorities like the Japanese, who dominated numerous farm occupations, were for a short time successful in establishing an indigenous system of collective bargaining. The attempt of the American Federation of Labor to unionize casual and migratory white farm workers was only slightly successful.

The first concerted program to organize farm workers on a nationwide scale was undertaken by the Industrial Workers of the World. In the beginning this union was most active among unskilled mass-production workers in the industrial Northeast and Middle West, but in later years it became more widely known for the vigorous campaign it carried out in agriculture. The I.W.W. professed a revolutionary doctrine of continuous direct action designed ultimately to overthrow the capitalist system. It condemned the exclusive and conciliatory policies followed by established craft unions and set out to organize unskilled labor in employments hitherto left almost untouched by the A.F. of L.

The I.W.W. attained its greatest strength among agricultural workers in those farming regions which had been experiencing intermittent farm-labor conflict for several decades. Its large following did not necessarily indicate dangerous radical proclivities on the part of farm laborers. It was, rather, a reflection of the growing divisions in economic interest and social status between employers and employees on farms which had become commercialized and large in scale. Itinerant laborers employed on mechanized wheat farms of the Middle West and on large fruit or vegetable ranches in California and the Pacific Northwest did not have to be well-versed in abstract revolutionary theory to understand the doctrines of class struggle preached by "wobbly" agitators.

The members of the I.W.W. rural labor organizations for the most part were not farm workers as a distinct and separate category. Rather they were a heterogeneous group of casual and migratory workers recruited during the harvest season from cities and towns. The majority were single men who were employed at a variety of seasonal jobs at different months of the year in mining, lumbering, railway maintenance, and agriculture.¹⁵

The union's activities among this element on the Pacific Coast during the prewar years were mainly agitational or educational in nature. Pre-

¹⁴Report, U. S. Industrial Commission, 1901, Part I, Vol. XI (p. 79), quoted in Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 47 (p. 17285).

¹⁵See Chapter XXII.

liminary indoctrination of hitherto unorganized workers was considered a prerequisite for effective direct action. Only in a few scattered instances, as in the famous "Wheatland Riot" of 1913, did the I.W.W. lead strikes in agriculture.

A more ambitious organization campaign was carried out among seasonal harvest hands in the great Wheat Belt of the Middle West during the war years. Here in 1915 was chartered the Agricultural Workers Organization, "The 400," which was later reorganized as Agricultural Workers Industrial Union No. 110. Members of these organizations were involved in many scattered strikes and violent conflicts with growers and law officers. The I.W.W. temporarily abandoned the earlier policy of street agitation and "soap boxing" in cities. It functioned instead as a decentralized union with an army of voluntary organizers or "camp delegates" who were employed at seasonal farm work to agitate and lead "job action" strikes.

The union was subjected to violent suppression by the Federal Government after America's entrance into the war. Its organization of agricultural workers in the Middle West finally disintegrated during the immediate postwar years, when mechanization of grain-harvesting operations in the Wheat Belt eliminated much of the heavy seasonal demand for migratory workers from other areas, as local farm hands could perform most of the work.¹⁶

Changing Labor Relations in the Twenties

No extensive attempt to organize agricultural workers was undertaken for more than a decade after the disappearance of the I.W.W. in agriculture. Some sporadic strikes and short-lived local unions developed in a few States during the immediate postwar years, most of them in industries allied to agriculture, such as canning, packing, and shipping of fruits and vegetables. The American Federation of Labor attempted in 1921 to organize skilled packing-shed workers on the Pacific Coast in the newly chartered Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union, but the campaign was abandoned within 2 years.¹⁷

The decade of the twenties was a period of quiescence in agricultural-labor unionism. It reflected in large part the lack of militancy in the American labor movement in general. Unions declined in membership and strength in urban industry, and in agriculture they disappeared entirely for several years. New labor supplies were made available to large-scale farm enterprises in special crop areas. Vegetable, fruit, and cotton growers in Texas, Arizona, and California relied largely upon importing Mexicans, whose numbers were not restricted by immigration quotas. Sugar-beet growers and refiners in Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana also utilized this labor supply intensively and transported large numbers by rail from Mexico and southern Texas. The Pacific Coast States supplemented the Mexicans with several thousand Filipinos. Other highly commercialized farming areas, such as southern New Jersey, depended upon recruiting unskilled and substandard labor (including large numbers of women and children) from nearby cities during the harvest season.¹⁸

¹⁶See Chapter XXII.

¹⁷See Chapter VI.

¹⁸See Josiah C. Folsom: *Truck Farm Labor in New Jersey*. (U. S. Department of Agriculture Bulletin No. 1285.) Washington, 1925.

The advent of the automobile served to increase the mobility of marginal and casual workers. Improved transportation facilities during the twenties rendered labor more continuously available to grower-employers, even during a period of industrial prosperity and relative labor scarcity. Migrant groups were composed increasingly of families working as units, in contrast to the single male "stiffs" or "hobos" characteristic of the prewar period.

Rising national income and an expanding export trade during the prosperous twenties increased in the demand for intensively grown crops like cotton, luxury vegetables, fruits, and nuts. At the same time large and accessible labor supplies from foreign and domestic sources furnished the means for increasing the output of such products. Certain farming regions particularly on the southern Atlantic and Pacific Coasts, experienced a rapid expansion in acreage devoted to commercialized crops grown intensively on large-scale farms. The scale of farming grew larger, seasonality in farming operations in these areas was on the whole accentuated, the mobility of farm labor was increased, and class divisions among rural occupational groups were widened.

When two or more workers are employed on a farm, in the opinion of one writer, the labor-employer relationship approaches that characteristic of urban industry rather than of farming.¹⁹ In the United States, by the nineteen thirties, 56.1 percent of all farm workers were on farms in this category. The proportion of farm workers employed in groups rather than as individuals was particularly high in certain States: 66.1 percent in New Jersey, 78.6 percent in California, 80.1 percent in Florida, and 82.2 percent in Louisiana.²⁰ An even greater degree of concentration was indicated for farm workers employed in larger groups:

In January (1935) approximately one-third of hired laborers as reported to the Bureau of the Census were on farms with four or more laborers, and about one-sixth were on farms with eight or more laborers. The areas of largest concentration of farms with groups of hired workers, as distinguished from a single hired hand, were the Delta cotton (with 54.5 percent on farms of four or more and 37.4 percent on farms of eight or more workers) and range areas (with 50.3 percent and 33.9 percent, respectively) and in the group of miscellaneous States: Florida and California. In California 59.1 percent of hired workers were on farms employing four or more, and 42.0 percent were on farms employing eight or more. Corresponding figures for Florida are 60.9 percent and 45.6 percent. In Arizona the concentration was even greater. In that State, 68.0 percent of hired workers were employed on farms with eight or more.²¹

The growing numbers and the changing composition of agricultural wage labor in the industrialized farming areas temporarily reduced its militancy. Family laborers and newly arrived immigrants were more difficult to unionize than were single men of the type organized by the I.W.W. The farm workers' bargaining position was further weakened by the strong and comprehensive control which growers exerted over the labor market when they were organized into employer associations. "Labor exchanges" or "labor bureaus" were established in California and Arizona to eliminate competition among individual employers, by standardizing wage rates throughout entire crop areas²² and recruiting the

¹⁹Louise Howard: *Labor in Agriculture*, London, Oxford University Press, 1935 (p. 32).

²⁰Quoted from Arthur M. Ross: *Agricultural Labor and Social Legislation*. Ph. D. Thesis in Economics, University of California, Berkeley, Calif., August 1941 (p. 43).

²¹Witt Bowden: *Three Decades of Farm Labor* (Bureau of Labor Statistics Serial No. R. 976, pp. 8-9), 1937.

²²A precedent for this practice had been established during periods of labor scarcity in the World War years. Under the initiative of State and county agricultural agents, growers in many regions of the country sought to decrease wasteful labor turn-over on farms by standardizing wage rates for competing units.

required labor supplies. County boards of agriculture took the initiative in stabilizing wage rates in some sections of New Jersey by setting a scale before the harvest season began and then influencing growers to adhere to it.²³

Labor exchanges and employers' associations served to strengthen the position of the grower by releasing him from dependence upon any particular group of laborers. On the other hand, there is little doubt that such institutions tended further to depersonalize labor relations in agriculture and to widen the cleavage of interests and attitudes between farm employers and employees. Hiring of labor by the industry rather than by the individual grower lessened whatever element of personal loyalty still remained in the more commercialized and large-scale farms. When employers utilized farmers' cooperative associations in setting wages and recruiting workers, they ultimately drove their laborers in turn to organize into unions and act collectively for self-protection.

²³Folsom, *op. cit.* (p. 28).

CHAPTER III.—Farm-Labor Movement in the Thirties

Farm Labor and the Depression

A succession of catastrophes in the nineteen thirties brought the farm-labor problem into new focus. Depression, Government-sponsored crop reduction and acreage control, drought, and rapid technological change all had the effect of displacing operators of small and medium-sized farms, particularly tenants, on a mass scale. They contributed large numbers to a chronic surplus agricultural-labor supply, already enlarged by sizable additions from the ranks of urban unemployed. The severe maladjustments wrought by these changes generated among farm laborers widespread unrest which culminated in a series of strikes of unprecedented scope and intensity throughout the country.

The underlying causes for the outbreaks lay beyond the more obvious factors of economic hardship and agitation. Migratory and casual wage earners in agriculture had long suffered—with little or no organized protest—low wages, depressed working conditions, job insecurity, and low social status. Several areas in which farm labor's lot was most benighted, particularly the intensive fruit and truck growing regions of Florida and other South Atlantic States, never witnessed unionism or strikes on farms. The most serious conflict was generated in regions where agricultural workers suffered a sudden and drastic deterioration in economic status. Farm wage rates were ground between the upper and nether millstones of low farm prices and increasingly severe competition for jobs. Farm employers suffered a heavier burden of fixed charges and sought to reduce their variable costs by cutting wages to the minimum. They could draw upon the masses of bankrupt farmers, as well as laborers who were displaced from city trades and forced to return to rural areas in a state of destitution. Farms which hired large numbers of seasonal laborers and which were accessible to important urban centers thus served continually as a catch-all for the unemployed and displaced from other industries.

Disparities in wages, hours, and general working conditions between agricultural and urban industrial jobs had long been a source of dissatisfaction, and in prosperous times a major cause for the long-term rural-urban migration trend. This movement was reversed in depression years and farm wage rates were further decreased by the increased competition for jobs. The still greater disparity between rural and urban labor standards¹ accentuated the unrest, particularly among new recruits drawn from urban industries where they had been exposed to labor unionism.

¹From what measurable data are available for that period, it appears that the decline in wage rates paid for all types of farm labor was proportionately greater than the decrease in the cost of living in agricultural areas. (See Yearbook of Agriculture, 1935, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington. Also Sidney Sutrin: Labor Organization in Agricultural America, in American Journal of Sociology, Vol. XLIII, No. 4, January 1938, p. 525.)

Even more severe hardships were suffered by agricultural workers, particularly the casual and migratory element, from the much greater irregularity and loss of man-hours in employment at these lower rates owing to the greater competition for jobs. Seasonal operations on large farms, unlike many industrial factories, do not have more or less fixed technical co-efficients with regard to the number of workers required. There is a wide range in the numbers of workers that can be employed at any one time to perform a given amount of work. The main variation occurs in the duration of the job. Thus the hardships suffered by agricultural workers during a period of labor surplus are primarily those of underemployment and low earnings.

(Continued on p. 16)

The agricultural ladder seemed to be working in reverse in many regions. Heavily indebted owners in large numbers became tenants, and tenants became dispossessed wage earners who were added to an already overburdened labor market. By 1930 almost 33 percent of those gainfully employed in agriculture were wage workers and sharecroppers and their numbers increased steadily in succeeding years. The Committee on Farm Tenancy appointed by President Roosevelt in 1937 noted "an increasing tendency for the rungs of the ladder to become bars * * * forcing imprisonment in a fixed social status from which it is increasingly difficult to escape."²

Depression, in brief, sharpened class divisions which had already been widened greatly in agriculture during the twenties. Farm laborers in certain areas concluded that their status as a class was fixed for some years to come and that opportunities to rise had disappeared. Organization of unions for the purpose of collective bargaining became almost the sole means by which agricultural workers could seek to protect their meager earning power.

Course of Unionism and of Strikes

The modern period of labor unionism in agriculture began during 1927-28, with a few short-lived local organizations and small strikes among melon pickers and shed packers in California, beet workers in Colorado, and greenhouse and nursery workers in Illinois. In 1930 several large strikes suddenly broke out in protest against the drastic wage cuts which were being applied at the beginning of a period of depression and unemployment. Two strikes were motivated by racial antagonism, sharpened by greater competition for jobs.

Rural and urban unions both declined in militancy and size of membership during the recession years from 1930 to 1933. Unemployment was increasing rapidly and labor's bargaining power in general was weakened. Labor agitation during those years tended to center on the problems of obtaining adequate relief rather than higher wages. The few local unions organized in agricultural industries all but disappeared, and the strikes that occurred were chiefly small spontaneous protests against continued wage cuts. As indicated in table 1, approximately 8,600 workers had participated in 8 farm strikes during 1930, and the number declined to about 3,000 workers in 5 strikes during 1931 and less than 3,200 workers in 10 much smaller strikes during 1932.

The situation changed dramatically in 1933, when labor unrest in American agriculture reached a peak of intensity. Approximately 56,800 workers participated in about 61 strikes in 17 different States throughout

rather than long-continued unemployment. The available man-hours of employment are spread over more men.

The severity of the farm labor surplus reached in the depression years is indicated in the Yearbook of Agriculture, 1935 (p. 189):

"From the postwar depression of 1921-22 until the winter of 1929, the demand for and the supply of farm labor was below normal, with supply usually above needs for the country as a whole. By April 1933, farmers were offering only three jobs where they normally offered five. Meantime, the farm labor supply increased. The excess was increased by the competition of men thrown out of other employment. There were five workers available in January 1933 for every two jobs available."

²Farm Tenancy Report of the President's Committee (prepared under the auspices of the National Resources Committee), Washington, February 1937 (p. 5).

the Nation. These conflicts continued on a smaller scale of size and frequency in the years immediately following.³

Table 1.—Strikes in the United States, by Years, 1930-39

Year and State	Number of strikes	Number of strikers	Number of States
All States.....	275	177,788	28
California.....	140	127,176	—
Other.....	135	50,612	—
1930.....	8	8,605	5
California.....	5	7,300	1
Other.....	3	1,305	4
1931.....	5	3,005	3
California.....	3	1,575	1
Other.....	2	1,430	2
1932.....	10	3,162	4
California.....	6	2,497	1
Other.....	4	665	3
1933.....	61	56,816	17
California.....	31	48,005	1
Other.....	30	8,811	16
1934.....	38	30,548	12
California.....	18	19,882	1
Other.....	20	10,666	11
1935.....	30	20,125	12
California.....	12	6,550	1
Other.....	18	13,575	11
1936.....	33	17,712	8
California.....	24	13,659	1
Other.....	9	4,053	7
1937.....	32	6,234	12
California.....	15	3,086	1
Other.....	17	3,148	11
1938.....	35	11,073	16
California.....	13	5,469	1
Other.....	22	5,604	15
1939.....	23	20,508	8
California.....	15	19,153	1
Other.....	8	1,355	7

A number of interrelated factors, all of which served to focus the attention of agricultural laborers on their greatly disadvantaged position, lay behind this upheaval. Farm wages reached their nadir in mid-1933 and lagged behind a rise in the general price level later in the year. At the same time, New Deal legislation like the National Industrial Recovery Act and that establishing the agricultural adjustment program (AAA) gave wide publicity to the fact that special favors were being granted to certain occupational groups, particularly farm owners and operators, non-agricultural labor, and urban industry. Agricultural workers enjoyed no such benefits. Only in the sugar-beet industry did the Government attempt to set minimum wages for field laborers. Farm-labor earnings and working conditions suffered by contrast with the widely heralded provisions of the NIRA, which established maximum hours and minimum wages of \$16 per week. Section 7a of the act gave tremendous impetus to urban unionism by granting legal protection to industrial labor's right to organize. Indirectly the NIRA encouraged the formation of unions among

³The strike statistics in table 1 above, and in tables 2, 3, and 4 in Chapter IV, have all been taken from several sources. Much of the data has been based upon Labor Disputes in Agriculture, 1927-38, compiled by J. C. Folsom, Associate Economist in the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington. Strike statistics for agriculture in California have been based largely upon reports by the State Bureau of Labor Statistics and Department of Industrial Relations. Several small strikes which were not reported in the above sources have been included in table 1 and following tables. Various compilations of strikes differ in their estimates, for reasons mentioned in Chapter I (pp. 2-3).

farm workers, despite their exclusion from its provisions.⁴ Dozens of new labor organizations, encompassing many different crops, occupational types, and sources of leadership, were established simultaneously in scattered agricultural areas throughout the country.

Spontaneous Strikes and Local Unions

The rebirth of farm-labor unionism as a social movement of nationwide proportions in 1933 developed from many scattered origins. It tended to assume a different form in each distinct farming region in the United States. Local unions in many instances grew out of spontaneous strikes; indigenous leaders and organizers rose from the ranks and usually were men more experienced in union affairs than the majority of strikers. Such was the history, for instance, of the Onion Workers Union of Hardin County, Ohio. Many spontaneous strikes, on the other hand, were so unorganized that no unions, or even an accepted leadership, developed to carry on collective bargaining with the employers. The series of spontaneous strikes in the hop fields of south central Oregon and in the tobacco plantations of Connecticut and Massachusetts was of this type.

Several strong indigenous unions were organized among hitherto nonunionized workers, and they carried out planned strikes for definite objectives. The initiative again rested generally with leaders and organizers who had been active previously in other labor movements or political parties. Such were the Asociacion de Jornaleros, organized among Mexican onion pickers in Webb County, Tex., the Beet Workers Union of Blissfield, Mich., the United Citrus Workers of Florida (whose membership late in 1933 reached a peak of approximately 30,000), the Southern Tenant Farmers Union of eastern Arkansas, and the Cape Cod Cranberry Pickers Union of Massachusetts, which later affiliated with the A.F. of L. through the International Hod Carriers and Common Laborers Union.

A few independent unions which had become inactive during the late twenties regained vigor, often under new leaders, in the revival of the mid-1930's. Mexican migratory and casual laborers in some areas had been organized in loose and unaggressive associations which tended to be under the domination of the Mexican consulates and their "sociedades honorificas." The Beet Workers Association of Colorado and the Confederacion de Uniones Obreras Mexicanos (C.U.O.M.) of southern California were the most important of these. Under the double stimuli of New Deal publicity and revived urban-labor unionism, and on some occasions under radical leadership, these workers became more militant in their collective-bargaining relations and used strikes to win economic objectives.

Several inactive federal labor unions of the A.F. of L. also were revived during this period. Local affiliates of the Federation at first applied collective bargaining and strikes almost exclusively to the more skilled

⁴The new wave of unionism was caused in part by ignorance among farm workers of the act's provisions. Many farm laborers reportedly sent in proposed codes of fair competition to the National Recovery Administration, although such proposals did not fall within the jurisdiction of this body. (See Sufirin, *op. cit.*, p. 554.)

Provisions of the NIRA, however, covered a number of the canning and packing industries allied to agriculture, and unions of workers in these processes often expanded "vertically" to include related field workers.

workers in trades allied to agriculture. Outstanding among these were the packing-shed workers in Monterey and Imperial Counties, Calif., the citrus packing-house workers in Polk and Highland Counties, Fla., the sheep shearers in the Mountain States region, and the greenhouse workers in Cook and Logan Counties, Ill., Middlesex County, Conn., Ashtabula, Ohio, and New Providence, N. J.

Agrarian Program of the Communist Party

Far overshadowing all other organizations in agriculture during the early thirties was the Communist Party's Trade Union Unity League (T.U.U.L.) a "dual" revolutionary federation established on a nationwide scale in opposition to the A.F. of L. The T.U.U.L. soon absorbed or "captured" many local indigenous unions. It was the first nation-wide labor union in agriculture to be established since the demise of the Industrial Workers of the World.

Previously the Communist Party of the United States had followed a policy of "boring from within" established trade-unions. This program was largely abandoned after the Sixth World Congress of the Third International in Moscow in 1928. A world-wide campaign against capitalism was to be launched by fomenting opposition to the status quo among the most exploited segments of the population in each country.

The Party in the United States made a concerted effort to organize elements that had been left untouched by the conservative and "craft-conscious" American Federation of Labor. Most promising among these were laborers in certain branches of marginal industries such as textiles, mining, and agriculture. Communist unions in these fields were affiliated with the Trade Union Unity League.

The "peasantry" of the United States came in for special attention in the Party program. Southern Negro and poor white sharecroppers, casual wage workers in highly capitalistic agricultural areas like California and Arizona, and debt-ridden small-farm owners and tenants in various regions were all considered to be potentially revolutionary material. Organizing policy differed for each group. "Self-determination of the Black Belt" was announced as the major objective of the Party in the South, and an ambitious program of agitation was carried out among southern Negroes. A "cadre" of advanced urban Negroes was trained to organize the backward colored "peasantry," who were to be united with the poor white population in a common class struggle of sharecroppers against landlords on the cotton plantations.⁵ Supporting these were to be urban labor unions in such industries as coal and iron mining and steel fabrication in the Birmingham area, which employed large numbers of both Negroes and whites.

The first fruits of this program in southern agriculture were gun battles between organized Negro sharecroppers and law-enforcement officers in eastern Alabama. Several Negroes were killed or wounded and many more were arrested and sentenced to prison when hundreds of armed white citizenry helped officers suppress the movement.⁶

⁵John Beecher: *The Sharecroppers Union in Alabama*, in *Social Forces*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, October 1934 (p. 124); *Negro Problem*, by Abram Harris and Sterling Spero in *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*.

⁶See Chapter XVII (pp. 294-296).

Among small-farm operators the Party centered its efforts on agitation throughout the Middle West and other "family farming" regions. A wave of evictions and foreclosures caused much unrest and conflict during the early depression years. Communist influence was very limited among these farmers, however; small numbers were drawn into branches of the Party-organized United Farmers League in several States, but this body attained no importance comparable to "reformist" organizations like the Farm Holiday Association and the Farmers Educational and Cooperative Union.⁷

The Party's most sensational and temporarily most successful organizing venture in agriculture was waged among casual and migratory seasonal workers in large-scale farming areas. The Trade Union Unity League first launched its agrarian campaign in California in 1930. Its representatives assumed control over a large spontaneous strike of several thousand field workers, and subsequently established a new farm labor organization, the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (C.&A.W.I.U.)

The T.U.U.L. remained comparatively inactive in agriculture for the next two years, although it led a few scattered and unsuccessful farm strikes in California and Colorado. The growing problem of unemployment was turning the attention of Communist organizers towards agitating for more adequate relief. Unemployed Councils were organized in cities and towns throughout dozens of States, to act as pressure groups. Hunger marches and demonstrations were mobilized throughout the country and often ended in violent and bloody clashes with police.

This program was related to the agrarian campaign. Agricultural workers constituted a disproportionate part of the unemployed population in many small towns. Unemployed Councils consequently were invaluable to the T.U.U.L. in facilitating organization in rural areas. They served also as a medium by which support for farm-labor unions could be enlisted from organized urban workers and other sympathizers.

The T.U.U.L. held the spotlight in a spectacular wave of 61 strikes of almost 57,000 farm workers that broke out during 1933. As shown in table 1, more than half of all farm strikes that occurred in the United States in that year, and four-fifths of all strikers, were in California. Approximately three-quarters of the strikes, covering dozens of crops and four-fifths of the more than 48,000 workers who participated in that State, were led by the C.&A.W.I.U.⁸ Representatives of that organization at the same time led or at least were active in strikes of several thou-

⁷Clarence Hathaway, in a report to a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the United States, May 25-27, 1935, was strongly critical of the Party's failure to organize small farmers. He condemned " * * * the sectarian tendencies which have run all through our farm work." The failure of Communist organizations to gain many adherents from among small farm operators was laid primarily to this cause. To quote Hathaway: " * * * It is the tendency generally to narrow things down, to try to keep the movement within the narrow confines of our own circles. There has not been the effort to penetrate into the Farm Holiday Association and the Farmers Union and other farm organizations that have mass influence in rural districts. To the degree that we have established contact with these farmers, the tendency has been to draw them away from these bodies, and into the United Farmers League * * * Our policy has not been the broad mass policy of setting in motion great numbers of farmers, but rather one of satisfying ourselves with a relatively small circle of farmers who were ready to accept our leadership and our program unquestioningly." (The Communist, New York, October 1935, p. 653.)

⁸Strike statistics for California, compiled by the California Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Bureau of Agriculture Economics of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, differ in their estimates. The divergences rest largely on the fact that (1) the BAE considers a series of simultaneous strikes in one crop as constituting one strike, whereas the California Bureau tabulates them separately, and (2) the BAE does not include processing workers (e.g., in lettuce-packing sheds) in its calculations. (See Chapter V.)

sand cotton pickers in Arizona and hop pickers in Oregon as well as in California.

The Communist Party was by no means the only leader of organized discontent in agriculture during 1933. Of some 30 strikes which occurred in 16 States other than California, none appears to have been dominated and few even directly influenced by Communist organizers. The largest and most violent movements were led by affiliates of the A.F. of L. and by independently organized unions.

Farm-labor strikes during 1934 were smaller in size and fewer in number, and Communist leadership was again limited for the most part to California. Eighteen of the 38 farm strikes in the United States and almost two-thirds of some 30,500 strikers were in that State alone, and about five-sixths of these strikes and an equal proportion of the participants were led by the C.&A.W.I.U. Its parent body, the T.U.U.L., established a few additional union affiliates in other regions, but on the whole the most important strikes in States other than California were led by independent organizations.

Communist unions among agricultural workers began to decline during 1934. The novelty of large spectacular strikes had worn off, and openly revolutionary doctrines had been found unattractive to farm labor in the long run. The C.&A.W.I.U. in California was suppressed by organized grower-employers who succeeded in breaking several strikes and finally securing the arrest and imprisonment of the leading left-wing unionists. The union became defunct in the summer of 1934 and its parent body, the Trade Union Unity League, was formally dissolved late in 1935.

The official "Party line" in the mid-thirties called for a new "united front" program of cooperation with liberal and reformist organizations, in response partly to the rising dangers of anti-Communist and antiliberal fascism. Left-wing organizers in the United States abandoned "dual unionism" and reverted to their former policy of "boring from within." To maintain its position of labor leadership, the Communist Party was forced again to work through established non-Communist organizations which had contact with large numbers of workers.⁹

Independent Unions and Federal Labor Unions of the A.F. of L.

Unions among seasonal agricultural wage laborers were usually unable to sustain themselves, for reasons which became apparent in the course of many strikes in California and other States. Seasonality, short duration of jobs, and high mobility, together with exceedingly low annual earnings as a result of low wage rates and a labor surplus, all raised obvious financial obstacles. A stable and self-supporting organization which had to rely upon a steady revenue in fees and dues was difficult to maintain on such a membership base. The per capita costs of organizing habitually mobile workers scattered over wide rural areas were far higher than for most urban trades, in which the labor force was more stable and concentrated residentially and occupationally.

A union of farm laborers to be effective, then, had to be part of a larger federation encompassing regularly employed and better-paid workers in related industries like canning and packing. Farm workers' unions

⁹Jack Stachel: *Some Problems in Our Trade Union Work*, The Communist (New York), Vol. XIII, No. 6, June 1934.

required continuous subsidies in money and personnel from other more financially secure and politically potent occupational groups. Affiliation with A.F. of L. trade-unions organized in strategic urban industries was the most feasible policy. These unions could mobilize the resources of organized industrial labor to support the agricultural workers by sympathetic strike action and other means of pressure.

Left-wing unionists early in 1935 began a campaign to organize local unions of agricultural and allied workers and to affiliate them with the A.F. of L. Former organizers of the C.&A.W.I.U., who had been the most bitter antagonists of the A.F. of L., now called for labor unity and urged all workers to use whatever means possible to join this organization.¹⁰ Representatives and sympathizers of organizations previously affiliated with the T.U.U.L. attended a National Conference of Agricultural Lumber and Rural Workers held in Washington, D. C., on January 9, 1935, at which a program was planned for organizing agricultural and rural workers on a nation-wide scale. A National Committee for Unity of Agricultural and Rural Workers, with headquarters in Washington, D. C., was established to coordinate the activities of all existing agricultural workers' organizations, to obtain the cooperation of organized labor in industrial centers, and to win the support of organizations among small farmers and unemployed. It planned later to hold crop-wide, State-wide, and regional conferences of farm workers in order to unify local bodies on a broader basis. The committee's ultimate goal was a nation-wide organization of agricultural and allied workers which could be chartered as an "international" union by the A.F. of L.¹¹

The national committee's immediate program centered upon organizing local unions, obtaining federal labor union charters from the A.F. of L., and affiliating them with central labor councils of nearby urban centers. Organizers and sympathizers within the existing independent unions promoted the same policy. Sympathizers in established urban unions sought to win active financial and moral support for rural organizations from State and local affiliates of the A.F. of L.¹²

The A.F. of L. hitherto had been inactive in agriculture, save for organizing a few short-lived local unions mentioned before. The more conservative leaders in the A.F. of L. felt that the costs of unionizing seasonal farm laborers outweighed any potential advantages to be derived. Hence they had relinquished the field to left-wing organizations such as the C.&A.W.I.U.

A.F. of L. unions during the first upsurge of activity in the early thirties had been restricted to the more-stable, skilled, and better-paid occupations connected with processing industries related to agriculture. Skilled migratory fruit and vegetable packing-shed workers in California and later in Arizona were organized into unions having "floating char-

¹⁰Rural Worker (published by the National Committee to Aid Agricultural Workers, Washington, D. C.), Vol. I, No. 1, August 1935 (p. 3).

¹¹Program and Organization adopted at the National Conference of Agricultural, Lumber and Rural Workers (mimeographed) Washington, D. C., January 9, 1935.

¹²Donald Henderson, president of the national committee and editor of its official organ, the Rural Worker, outlined the organizing program in the second issue of that paper in September 1935 (Vol. I, No. 2). The three main types of unions to be organized were as follows:

"1. *Crop unions*, to be composed of all workers, organized or unorganized, employed or unemployed, who were connected with particular crops in which certain areas specialized, such as citrus fruits in central Florida, mushrooms in southeastern Pennsylvania, truck vegetables in southern New Jersey, and sugar beets in the South Platte Valley of Colorado.

"2. *General farm workers' unions*, designed for local casual workers in towns and villages who worked at many different farm jobs during various months of the year. In so far as such workers were unemployed a good part of each year, such unions should serve the double purpose of collective bargaining for better wages and working conditions during the working months, and of fighting for adequate relief during the off-season months of unemployment.

(Continued on p. 23)

ters," which gave them State-wide jurisdiction. Other packing-house workers attached to particular crop areas were organized into locals having limited jurisdiction. In other States the A.F. of L. organized and chartered a few scattered locals of skilled and specialized occupational groups such as sheep shearers, hay balers, tree surgeons, horticultural workers, and employees of nurseries and greenhouses. Unskilled and semiskilled workers in agricultural industries organized by the A.F. of L. usually belonged to heterogeneous federal labor unions which included labor in nonfarm trades. Twenty-three such organizations altogether had been chartered by the summer of 1935 in the States of California, Arizona, Florida, Washington, Montana, Missouri, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan.¹³ Only a few local unions at this time were organized specifically for agricultural workers.¹⁴ Most of these had developed from spontaneous strikes or from unions previously organized by the T.U.U.L. and independent bodies.

Farm-labor strikes in California varied widely in size and number from those in other States during this period. Suppression of the C.&A. W.I.U. in California left agricultural workers temporarily without leaders. Most of the 12 comparatively small strikes that did occur during 1935 were either spontaneous in origin or led by unaffiliated local organizations. In 11 other States, by contrast, more than 13,500 farm workers participated in some 18 strikes. As may be seen from table 1, this represented the largest number of strike participants outside California for any one year in the 1930's. The upsurge was explained in part by the new support in money and personnel which urban labor organizations were furnishing to agricultural workers for the first time in many areas. The National Committee for Unity of Agricultural Workers was of paramount influence in this program.

The large-scale organizing campaign by left-wing unionists during 1935 and 1936 brought a rapid increase in the number of local and federal labor unions in agriculture. The National Committee to Aid Agricultural Workers (renamed) claimed by the fall of 1936 a total of 72 local unions

¹³*Cannery and packing-house unions*, to include workers in the processing stages of agriculture, such as canneries, packing sheds, and dairy plants. Such plants were felt to have a close functional relationship to agricultural workers, since they often employed the wives and children of farmers and farm workers."

Organizers and delegates of farm workers were advised to seek the help of A.F. of L. unions in cities and towns in setting up rural unions and obtaining federal labor union charters. Once chartered, such farm workers unions were then instructed to affiliate with the nearest central labor union in order to secure the utmost support from organized urban labor. Cooperation was also to be sought with small farmers whose position was precarious, and farm workers' unions were instructed to support this element. To quote Mr. Henderson: "We must point out that their interests are threatened by the same rich farmers, cannery owners and big business class who cheat us. We should approach organizations of poor farmers and propose united action where our interests are in common."

Differences in status and group interests between farm operators and farm laborers were recognized, however. It was advised that "the small farmers should not be organized in the same unions with farm workers, except where the farmer is also a farm worker or on relief. Even in such cases, as soon as the organization of these farmers has grown to any number, a separate organization of small farmers should be set up."

The third important element whose support was considered important was the lower middle class—the small shopkeepers and professionals—of small towns and villages in which farm workers were organized. Because the livelihood of such groups depended in part on the purchasing power of farm workers, it was felt that a basis for cooperation existed. The most important union policy, it was emphasized, was to "neutralize" this class in case of a strike so that it would not furnish strikebreakers and vigilantes.

¹⁴See list in Appendix B: Agricultural, canning and packing unions affiliated to the American Federation of Labor, October 1935.

¹⁴These included the Citrus Workers Union No. 18234 of Winter Haven and the United Citrus Workers Union No. 19180 of Dundee, Fla.; the Citrus, Vegetable and Farm Workers Union No. 19274 of San Diego, Calif.; the Farm Laborers Union No. 19845 of Casa Grande, Ariz.; the United Evergreen Pickers No. 19068 of Centralia, Wash.; and the Agricultural Workers Unions No. 19994 of Blissfield, Mich., No. 19724 of McGuffey, Ohio, and No. 19996 of Bridgeton, N. J.

affiliated to the A.F. of L., including 40 among field laborers, 22 among canning and packing-house employees, and 10 among dairy workers. The official dues-paying membership was estimated to number 7,500, while the unofficial membership was claimed to run as high as 50,000.¹⁵

The most rapid organizational gains were won in processing industries related to agriculture. Union organizers tended to focus their activities on these plants primarily because these industrial workers, unlike farm laborers, received legal protection under the terms of the newly enacted National Labor Relations Act. Unions of agricultural and allied workers revived strongly during 1936 in California, where they were supported by the increasingly powerful transport workers' organizations, the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Hence, the rapid increase in size and number of strikes in that State, as seen in table 1.

State-wide and National Unionism, and Inter-Union Conflict

Local unions of agricultural and allied workers began to federate on a regional and State-wide basis during 1936. Local unions of migratory packing-shed workers in California and Arizona had been granted State-wide jurisdiction in their charters, and steps were taken to establish general State federations for all workers in agriculture and related industries. Local unions of beet workers in Colorado were drawn together into the Federation of Agricultural and Beet Workers Unions, which received a charter from the A.F. of L. Urban trade or industrial unions and central labor councils established agricultural organizing committees in several States, such as Florida, Texas, and New Jersey, where farm labor unionism was potentially strong but currently limited in scope.¹⁶

The National Committee to Aid Agricultural Workers meanwhile was making plans to federate local and State-wide organizations into one international union. As authorized by the constitution of the American Federation of Labor,¹⁷ such a body would include occupational groups of all types in agriculture and allied industries—field workers, cannery and packing-house employees. Spokesmen of the national committee stressed the limitations imposed upon federal labor unions within the A.F. of L.:

These local unions feel that the present lack of a national organization is a serious obstacle in their work. The membership and the local leaders know from bitter experience that the federal and local trade-union form is unsatisfactory.

The present federal labor union charter forces them to depend upon inexperienced advice and the overburdened national office of the A.F. of L. It forces them to pay an excessive per capita tax to the national office of the A.F. of L. which in most cases cannot be called upon for financial help when it is needed. (Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 16, December 1935, p. 3.)

¹⁵Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 16, November 1936. Because of the high per capita tax payment to the national executive council of the A.F. of L., required under a federal labor union charter, the number of official members for whom dues were paid by each local was kept to a minimum.

¹⁶Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 2, February 1936 (p. 6).

¹⁷Article IX, section 2, of the constitution states that—

"The executive council shall use every means to organize new national or international trade or labor unions, and to organize local trade-unions, and to connect them with the Federation until such time as there is a sufficient number to form a national or international union, when it shall be the duty of the president of the Federation to see that such organization is formed."

Agricultural labor organizers and their sympathizers exerted increasing pressure upon the A.F. of L. to charter an international union. Two State federations of labor and several central labor councils throughout the country passed resolutions petitioning the executive council of the A.F. of L. to take this step. The issue came to the fore at the national convention of the American Federation of Labor in Tampa, Fla., during November 1936. Twelve delegates representing agricultural, cannery, and packing-house unions in the States of California, Colorado, Michigan, New Jersey, and Florida presented six resolutions calling for an international charter.

The aggressiveness of this small nucleus in the convention was expressed also in 25 separate resolutions on agricultural labor which it introduced. Resolutions on vigilantism, Tampa floggings, discrimination against beet laborers on relief, removal of residence requirements for migratory labor to obtain relief, establishment of adequate transient camps for migratory labor, and provision for adequate rural housing, were introduced by this group, and passed by the convention. One of the greatest victories won by the agricultural delegates was the passage of a resolution putting the American Federation of Labor on record as favoring the inclusion of agricultural workers and their families in all Federal and State legislation dealing with social security.

This activity, however, stirred up adverse reactions. The convention later passed a resolution to remove the right of federal and local unions to introduce resolutions in all future conventions. It provided that such locals must submit their proposals to the executive council at least 30 days beforehand.

The executive council of the A.F. of L. finally conferred with the agricultural delegates and requested them to submit to President William Green a financial plan for organizing a national union of agricultural and allied workers. He refused to charter a new international for agriculture, at least in the immediate future. As a compromise measure the executive council of the A.F. of L. instructed him to call a nation-wide conference of all local agricultural and allied unions. These were to be united in a temporary National Agricultural Workers Council, which would serve as a clearing house of information and service until a permanent international union could be established.¹⁸

The A.F. of L. officialdom hesitated to finance the organization of a new international union of farm labor, for several reasons. The extreme uncertainty of agricultural employment—the high seasonality and mobility of the labor, and wide fluctuations in the number employed—made any such venture precarious. It was possible, also, that such an international, after the A.F. of L. had made large outlays of money for its establishment might secede and join the Committee for Industrial Organization. Pro-C.I.O. sympathies had been expressed openly by many agricultural labor organizers, particularly those formerly connected with the Trade Union Unity League. John L. Lewis and other high C.I.O. officials on several occasions had been approached to support farm-labor unionism.

Sentiment for organizing an international to be affiliated with the C.I.O. grew during the spring of 1937, particularly after a substantial investment of money by that body for a nation-wide organizing campaign was assured. Spokesmen of the again renamed National Committee of Agri-

¹⁸Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 3, March 1937 (p. 1).

cultural, Cannery and Packinghouse Unions became increasingly dissatisfied with the status of farm laborers in the A.F. of L. They charged that their federal labor unions were paying \$3,500 monthly in per capita dues to the national office of the A.F. of L., and were getting little or nothing in return. The A.F. of L. had hired no organizers specifically for farm laborers. Local unions felt that the money collected from dues should go to a national organization of agricultural workers to help defray the direct expenses of unionizing farm and cannery labor over a wide area.

Agricultural workers suffered from political impotence in addition to weak economic bargaining power. This was manifested particularly in their exclusion from the benefits of social legislation passed by the Federal Government, and was attributed to their having no powerful nation-wide pressure group to act on their behalf. Donald Henderson, secretary-treasurer of the national committee, wrote:

* * * We need our own national and State offices, leadership, and organizers with the power and prestige of a national union in back of them to help us with our local problems. With a national organization we will command more respect in our negotiations with our employers; we will be able to secure more effective support from the other international unions in the organized labor movement. (*Rural Worker*, Vol. II, No. 6, June 1937, p. 2.)

Henderson argued that the industrial-union structure of the C.I.O. was better adapted than the A.F. of L. to meet the needs of agricultural workers:

* * * In agriculture, we cannot organize along craft lines of separate unions for each type of work. We must clearly build a union including all workers in agricultural and related fields such as canneries, packing houses, etc. The policy of the C.I.O. in successfully organizing in industry-wide unions and their policy of aggressively assisting the organization of the unorganized with advice, funds, and organizers makes it necessary for us to seriously consider affiliation to the C.I.O. (*Rural Worker*, Vol. II, No. 6, June 1937, p. 2.)

The affiliation issue came to a head during the spring of 1937. Serious interunion conflict occurred in California, which had long been the center of the agricultural-labor movement. The State federation of labor was divided by a growing rift between two strongly opposed union groups, each of which had a direct interest in organizing field, cannery and packing-house workers. The pro-C.I.O. wing, led by the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union and its allies (including the more active left-wing organizers among agricultural and cannery workers) favored an industrial union which would encompass all types of workers, skilled and unskilled, who were employed in farming and related industries. The officials of the State federation, supported by the powerful Brotherhood of Teamsters, favored separate organizations for the more skilled and occupationally stable canning and packing workers, as distinct from the unskilled migratory field laborers. Representatives of the group favoring the C.I.O. met in a State-wide conference in the spring of 1937 and formed the California Federation of Agricultural and Cannery Unions. The State federation executive council promptly ousted all local union officers suspected of being Communist or pro-C.I.O. in sympathy and revoked the charters of several organizations.

The California Federation of Agricultural and Cannery Unions then came out in support of the National Committee of Agricultural, Cannery and Packinghouse Unions, which was attempting to form an international

chartered by the C.I.O. George Woolf, president of the former organization, wrote:

The time has come to take matters in our own hands, call a national conference, draw up our own constitution, and bylaws, elect our own officers, and form our national agricultural and cannery union. (Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 6, June 1937, p. 3.)

A national convention was held in Denver, during July 1937. It was attended by a hundred delegates from 24 States, representing 56 different independent and A.F. of L. federal labor unions¹⁹ claiming a total membership of about 100,000 workers. An international union was established, and received a charter from the C.I.O. as the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (U.C.A.P.A.W.A.). It included such diverse occupational and sectional groups as cannery workers from Maryland, landscape and cannery workers from the Middle West, mushroom workers from New York, sharecroppers and cotton-field laborers from Arkansas and Alabama, beet workers from the Rocky Mountain States, citrus workers from Florida, and fruit, vegetable and fish cannery workers from the North Atlantic and Pacific Coasts.²⁰

United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America

Unionism in agriculture and related industries gained new vitality when the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was organized and financed from the C.I.O. treasury. Within the first 2 months of its existence it chartered 76 local unions.²¹ By the end of 17 months its record appeared truly impressive. President Donald Henderson, at the second national convention in December 1938, stated that the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was the seventh largest union in the entire Congress of Industrial Organizations, claiming a voting membership of 124,750 workers belonging to more than 300 local unions.²²

Other industrial-union elements pledged their support to the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. at the constitutional convention of the C.I.O. at Pittsburgh. The union delegates passed resolutions favoring the extension of State and Federal labor legislation to include farm labor within its provisions and to amend the AAA so as to require farm employers who received benefits to meet certain minimum wage and labor standards. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. claimed to have established itself in Washington, D. C., as a recognized spokesman for agricultural workers before such Federal Government agencies as the National Labor Relations Board, the Wage and Hour Division, the Departments of Labor and Agriculture, the Farm Security Administration, the Social Security Board, the Works Progress Administration, and various Congressional Committees.

¹⁹See Appendix C (p. 426).

²⁰Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 7, July 1937 (p. 1).

²¹Idem, Vol. II, No. 8, August 1937 (p. 2).

²²This and all following material on U.C.A.P.A.W.A. (except where otherwise noted) is from U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Yearbook, Second Annual Convention, San Francisco, Calif., Vol. I, December 1938.

The union appeared also to occupy a key position for encouraging closer cooperation between organized labor and farmers. President Donald Henderson of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. and E. L. Oliver of Labor's Non-partisan League met with the national board of the Farmers Union in St. Paul, Minn., during December 1937, and signed a "pact of cooperation" which aimed to secure legislation and carry on educational work of benefit to farm laborers and small-farm operators.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A., moreover, was established on a much firmer base than any previous unions in the field. It claimed nearly 40,000 members who were covered by signed contracts providing wage increases, improved working conditions, and vacations with pay. A large percentage of these contracts also entailed closed-shop and check-off agreements. A large and indefinite number of temporary verbal contracts were obtained for agricultural workers employed in harvesting various crops. Particularly large gains in membership were claimed among field workers in certain specialty farming regions: beet-raising areas of Colorado and Wyoming, cotton and vegetable growing areas of Arizona, the citrus belt of Florida, and the Southern Cotton Belt.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. won its most substantial gains in processing industries related to agriculture. (Some of these were only distantly related.) The strongest affiliates, claiming 16,000 members covered by closed-shop contracts, were organized among fish-cannery and seafood workers in the Pacific Northwest and South Atlantic. Unions in fruit and vegetable canning and general food processing constituted the U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s main foundation in the industrial Northeast and Middle West. The international by the end of 1938 claimed 12,000 employees in this industry as members, of whom 5,000 were covered by signed contracts.

In California, which had long been the stronghold of unionism in agriculture and allied industries, the U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s organizing drive was a conspicuous failure. It faced strong opposition from well-organized anti-union farm employers. Furthermore, it was "frozen out" of the fruit and vegetable canning industry in that State by the A.F. of L. which had control over truck transportation vital to food-processing industries.

A trend away from field laborers in agriculture was apparent in union policy during this period. From an international union designed primarily for farm workers, the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. had become a federation of labor organizations whose main source of strength lay among the employees of allied processing industries, many of which were not closely related to farming. The trend continued in subsequent years. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. extended its organization into other processing industries, like cotton ginning and compressing in California, Arizona, and Tennessee, cigar wrapping in New York City, basket weaving in New Jersey, and cigarette manufacturing in Virginia and North Carolina. Its field workers' unions declined and finally disappeared completely.

The reasons for this transition in structure were financial rather than ideological. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. had "spread itself thin" during the great organizing campaign of late 1937 and 1938, and the high cost of unionizing low-paid and underemployed agricultural workers

scattered over a wide area had taken a major part of the funds contributed by the C.I.O. and other allied or sympathetic organizations.²⁹ Internecine strife further weakened its hold on the workers.

Particularly embarrassing and costly to the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was its leadership of many large and spontaneous strikes among field workers. These were lost in many cases because of inadequate preparation and advance organization; nevertheless, they redounded to the discredit of the union besides involving it in considerable expense. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. consequently adopted a policy of refusing to support agricultural workers whose strikes were not previously authorized by district representatives. It came to rely more heavily upon the programs of the Farm Security Administration and other sympathetic government agencies to improve wages and working conditions for farm workers. Direct collective bargaining and strikes were abandoned in large part. The convention report as early as 1938 stated flatly (p. 20) that "U.C.A.P.A.W.A. does not consider strikes as the most effective weapon in this field. In many cases the international does not encourage strikes. To the workers strike means a loss of several days when the season is already short." Most of the 35 strikes involving approximately 11,000 workers in 1938 and 23 involving about 20,500 in 1939 were spontaneous in origin or led by organizations other than U.C.A.P.A.W.A.

The international finally divested itself of almost all field workers' local unions, in the interests of economy and, indeed, of its own survival as a self-sustaining organization. The executive committee at the 1940 convention decided officially to abandon several districts, and to restrict the U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s jurisdiction to compact areas in which agricultural and allied workers would be accessible to district headquarters.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s decline in agriculture was offset to some degree by the expansion of A.F. of L. unions. The California State Federation of Labor in 1937 had established a National Council of Cannery and Agricultural Workers, which organized many new locals during the following 2 years among workers in various processing industries, and won the affiliation of several of the largest independent unions of field laborers. Minor gains of a similar nature were achieved in other States.

America's unprecedented war production program diverted the attention of both C.I.O. and A.F. of L. from agriculture to key urban industries where more fruitful organizational gains were to be made. Several of the more able organizers who were formerly active among farm workers were put on the pay roll of urban industrial and trade-unions. Those remaining in the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. (C.I.O.) and the National Council of Cannery and Agricultural Workers (A.F. of L.) restricted their efforts still more to the processing industries related to agriculture.

²⁹It was estimated that the union spent an additional \$18,000 from December 1938 to November 30, 1940, in organizing field workers, while little more than \$6,000 was collected from them in initiation fees and dues. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. consequently fell heavily into debt. (See Proceedings, Third National Convention of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America, Chicago, 1940 (p. 22); also Harry Schwartz: Recent Developments among Farm Labor Unions, *Journal of Farm Economics*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, November 1941 (p. 483).)

CHAPTER IV.—National Perspective

Concentration of Strikes by Area and Crop

The labor movement in American agriculture, with scattered roots reaching back into the nineteenth century, seemed suddenly to have attained nation-wide scope during the 1930's. Labor trouble on the land appeared to cover a wide area. As seen in table 2, almost 178,000 farm workers during the decade participated in some 275 strikes in 28 States and the District of Columbia.

Farm strikes, however, showed a high degree of concentration by geographic area. They were notably absent in several distinct regions. Sparsely settled States in the Rocky Mountains, such as New Mexico, Nevada, and Utah, remained singularly free of farm-labor trouble. Few or no strikes occurred in the more depressed States of the Southern Cotton Belt, such as South Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi. Urban industries in this region were comparatively undeveloped, industrial labor unions were weak and ineffective, and the status of the Negro and poor white farm population was perhaps least secure. States characterized by small diversified family-farm economies also remained virtually untouched by agricultural labor unionism: Kentucky and Tennessee in the mountain region of the South; Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont in New England; and most of the States in the Corn and Wheat Belts of the Middle West.

Table 2.—Agricultural Labor Strikes, by States, 1930-39

State	Number of strikes	Number of strikers	Number of large strikes (1,000 and over)	Number of strikers
Total, 28 States.....	275	177,788	50	112,524
Alabama.....	3	4,500	2	4,000
Arkansas.....	6	8,162	3	7,500
Arizona.....	6	5,100	2	4,500
California.....	140	127,176	34	82,724
Colorado.....	5	820		
Connecticut.....	7	1,012		
Florida.....	9	2,660	1	1,600
Idaho.....	3	2,000	1	1,500
Illinois.....	5	247		
Indiana.....	1	35		
Maryland.....	1	12		
Massachusetts.....	8	1,882		
Michigan.....	2	1,500		
Minnesota.....	2	54		
Missouri.....	4	1,072	1	1,000
Montana.....	1	1,000	1	1,000
New Jersey.....	7	1,017		
New York.....	8	2,666	1	1,200
North Carolina.....	1	200		
Ohio.....	11	1,535		
Oregon.....	17	8,079	2	4,500
Pennsylvania.....	6	535		
Texas.....	6	4,057	2	3,000
Vermont.....	1	70		
Virginia.....	1	25		
Washington.....	9	1,575		
Wisconsin.....	2	250		
Wyoming.....	2	520		
District of Columbia.....	1	27		

The dominant factor determining the size and frequency of strikes in each agricultural area appeared to be the prevalence of large-scale farms. California, as the previous chapter has noted, suffered organized labor-employer conflict out of all proportion to its numbers of agricultural workers. More than half of all strikes occurred in this State alone, and they included more than two-thirds of all participants. Henry H. Fowler, chief counsel of the United States Senate Civil Liberties Committee, summarized his findings as follows:

Although California normally employs only 4.4 percent of the Nation's agricultural field laborers, California has been the scene of from 34.3 to 100 percent of the Nation's strikes in this field each year. These California strikes have involved from 31.8 to 96.5 percent of the yearly total of workers involved in the Nation's agricultural field operations' strikes. Although California normally employs 25.9 percent of the Nation's canning and preserving and cane-sugar-refining workers, California has been subject to from 30.3 to 50 percent of the Nation's strikes in this field four out of six and a half years in the period under consideration (i.e., from January 1, 1933, to July 1, 1939). These California strikes have involved from 30 to 74.5 percent of the total of workers in the Nation's canning and preserving and cane-sugar-refining strikes. (Hearings, La Follette Committee, Part 47, p. 17210.)

Only in this State could agricultural labor unionism be considered truly a "labor movement," in the sense that an institutional framework was maintained continuously for several years to carry on collective bargaining enforced by organized agitation and strikes. The structure of California's agricultural economy was particularly conducive to conflict. More than a third of the Nation's large-scale farms were in this State; wage laborers constituted a disproportionately large segment of the rural population, and they were among the most mobile and seasonal in job tenure.

The labor-trouble centers within California during 1930-39 are indicated in table 3, in which counties are ranged according to size and frequency of strikes. A high degree of concentration is indicated. Of the 149 strikes, 76, or more than half, occurred in 9 of the 35 counties affected in California. These leading counties included two highly urbanized areas, namely, Los Angeles and Alameda (hinterland of metropolitan Oakland and San Francisco), where agricultural workers employed in various crops were influenced by urban labor movements. Other leading strike counties were characterized by specialized large-scale farming. Imperial County has long been a center of large and violent strikes. According to the United States Census of 1930 its average expenditure per farm for hired labor was nearly 10 times the average for employing farms in the United States as a whole.¹ Average labor expenditures per farm were similarly high for Monterey, Kern, and San Joaquin Counties—8, 6 and 5 times the national average.

The correlation between labor trouble and large-scale agriculture is brought out also in the statistics for large "general" strikes, chosen arbitrarily as those in which 1,000 or more workers participated. San Joaquin County again led with 5 such outbreaks, followed by Imperial and Monterey Counties with 4 each. Altogether, 43 large general strikes occurred in 20 counties in California.

Labor troubles in other States were generally more limited in scope and duration. Most of the strikes either were spontaneous in origin or were led by local organizations that rarely lasted for more than one

¹See Chapter VII (p. 70).

Table 3.—Agricultural Labor Strikes in California, by Counties, 1930-39

County	Number of strikes	Number of large strikes (1,000 and over)	County	Number of strikes	Number of large strikes (1,000 and over)
Total, 34 counties ¹ . . .	149	44			
San Joaquin	12	5	Yolo	4	
Alameda	11	1	King	3	3
Los Angeles	9	2	Madera	3	3
Imperial	8	4	Ventura	3	1
San Luis Obispo	8	3	Yuba	3	
Santa Clara	7	2	Contra Costa	3	
Sacramento	7	2	Butte	2	1
Kern	7	2	Stanislaus	2	1
Santa Cruz	7	(²)	Sonoma	1	1
Monterey	6	4	Marin	1	
Orange	6	3	Glenn	1	
Merced	5	2	Sutter	1	
San Mateo	5	2	Solano	1	
Tulare	5	1	Tehama	1	
Fresno	5	1	San Bernardino	1	
Santa Barbara	5		Placer	1	
San Benito	4		El Dorado	1	

¹The statistics for this table are compiled from the same sources as tables 1, 2, and 4. Table 3, however, indicates a total of 149 strikes and 43 "large" strikes (1,000 or more participants) for California, as compared to 140 and 34, respectively, in the other tables. This divergence was made necessary by the fact that several "general" or crop-wide strikes each encompassed more than one county, so that a tabulation of strikes according to individual counties made duplication unavoidable. Due to continual intercounty migration on the part of strikers, it was found impossible to estimate adequately the total number of participants in each county.

²Part of Alameda County's.

season. The participants in the majority of instances were casual and migratory day laborers hired for special jobs like chopping, weeding, thinning, and, above all, harvesting. The essential similarity in tactics and issues in most instances suggested a fundamental likeness in the problems faced by farm laborers. California's structure of farm operations and pattern of labor relations seemed to represent an extreme stage

Table 4.—Strikes in the United States, by Crops, 1930-39

Crop or occupation, and State	Number of strikes	Number involved	Number of States affected	Number of large strikes (1,000 and over)	Number involved
Total (number of crops affected, 39) . . .	275	177,788	28	50	112,524
California	140	127,176	28	34	82,724
Other	135	50,612		16	29,800
Vegetables	29	15,128	9	4	10,600
California	14	12,627		4	10,600
Other	15	2,501			
Peas	27	22,746	6	9	24,977
California	16	18,605		8	13,474
Other	11	4,141		1	1,500
Citrus	20	7,283	4	2	3,600
California	7	4,266		1	2,000
Other	13	3,017		1	1,600
Greenhouse and nursery	21	1,327	9		
California	3	195			
Other	18	1,132			
Cotton	17	47,302	6	12	45,500
California	5	27,650		3	27,000
Other	12	19,652		9	18,500

Table 4.—*Strikes in the United States, by Crops, 1930-39—Con.*

Crop or occupation, and State	Number of strikes	Number involved	Number of States affected	Number of large strikes (1,000 and over)	Number involved
Peaches.....	15	6,952	2	3	3,000
California.....	14	6,940		3	3,000
Other.....	1	12			
Hops.....	13	8,023	3	2	4,500
California.....	2	1,025			
Other.....	11	6,998		2	4,500
Apples.....	13	3,466	6	1	2,000
California.....	2	2,250		1	2,000
Other.....	11	1,216			
Lettuce: California.....	7	15,322	1	4	7,900
Beets.....	8	3,905	1	1	1,200
California.....	4	1,755		1	1,200
Other.....	4	2,150			
Tobacco: Other.....	8	1,047	2		
Berries.....	7	3,425	3	2	2,500
California.....	4	2,835		2	2,500
Other.....	3	590			
Dairy.....	7	1,194	2		
California.....	6	1,094			
Other.....	1	100			
Sheep.....	7	3,030	5	1	1,000
California.....	1	650			
Other.....	6	2,380		1	1,000
Celery: California.....	7	7,000	1	3	5,400
Grapes: California.....	7	8,403	1	1	1,000
Apricots: California.....	6	3,959	1		
Poultry.....	4	1,405	2	1	1,200
California.....	3	205			
Other.....	1	1,200		1	1,200
Onions: Other.....	4	2,337	3	1	1,500
Brussels sprouts: California.....	4	1,008	1		
Pears: California.....	4	1,935	1	1	1,600
Tomatoes: California.....	4	816	1		
Cherries.....	4	1,125	3		
California.....	2	900			
Other.....	2	225			
Cranberries: Other.....	3	1,405	1		
Melons.....	3	2,595	2	1	2,500
California.....	2	2,500		1	2,500
Other.....	1	95			
Asparagus.....	3	2,546	2	1	2,500
California.....	2	2,521		1	2,500
Other.....	1	25			
Beans.....	3	550	2		
California.....	2	550			
Other.....	1	(¹)			
Potatoes: California.....	3	500	1		
Plums: California.....	2	700	1		
Spinach: California.....	2	140	1		
Mushrooms: California.....	2	95	1		
Garlic: California.....	1	500	1		
Artichokes: California.....	1	150	1		
Olives: California.....	1	80	1		
Florists and gardeners: Other.....	1	105	1		
Corn: Other.....	1	100	1		
Cauliflower: Other.....	1	100	1		
Tree surgeons: Other.....	1	27	1		
Unknown: Other.....	4	57	3		

¹Unknown.

of development in a trend occurring spottily in other regions. Strikes in each State were limited mainly to areas in which farming was concentrated in large specialized enterprises, and where class divisions were pronounced. Outstanding among such areas were certain sections of the southern cotton-growing region, the citrus belt of Florida, onion-growing tracts in Ohio and Texas, tobacco-plantation areas in Connecticut and Massachusetts, cranberry bogs in Massachusetts, truck-farming sections of New Jersey and Washington, hop-growing areas of Oregon, sugar-beet fields in Ohio, Michigan, and Colorado, and sheep ranches in the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast States.

Farm strikes showed a high degree of concentration by crops as well as by geographic areas, as shown in table 4. Ninety-three, or well over one-third of the total 275 farm strikes in the country, were confined to four crops—less than a ninth of those affected during the thirties. In California, as may be seen from table 4, 44 or almost one-third of the 140 strikes occurred in only three leading crops (less than a tenth of the 31 crops affected). Still greater concentration of labor trouble in farm crops is indicated by the number of workers involved. About 70,000 or almost two-fifths of approximately 178,000 strikers in American agriculture participated in two crops only—peas and cotton. If to these are added some 15,100 in vegetables and 15,300 in lettuce, then about 100,400, or well over half of all strikers in the 10-year period, 1930-39, were employed in only four crops, or one-eighth of all those affected.² California agriculture shows a similar concentration.

The crops which had the most strikes altogether also experienced, by and large, the most numerous "general" strikes involving one thousand or more workers at a time.³ Fifty such strikes throughout the Nation affected 18 crops, and in California alone 34 occurred in 14 crops. The largest number of strikers in any one crop occurred in vegetables, where there were 29 throughout the country; only cotton and peas surpassed vegetables in the number of "general" strikes. Vegetables also experienced strikes in more States (9) than did any other single crop. Field peas came second only to vegetables in number of strikes and number of States affected, and led in number of general strikes. Special crops, like lettuce, celery, hops, peaches, and apples, followed closely. Cotton occupied a singular position; although it had fewer strikes than several other crops, it far surpassed them in the size of its strikes and the number of participants—more than 47,300 or well over a fourth of approximately 178,000 strikers in the country, and more than 27,500 or more than a fifth of some 127,000 strikers in California. The extreme concentration of strikes in regard to both number and size suggests that some fields of agriculture were characterized by highly frictional relationships. Their structure of farming operations and their pattern of labor relations provoked an unusual degree of collective action.

²The statistics compiled in table 4, for reasons mentioned before, differ from those presented by Henry H. Fowler in his Introductory Statement in Hearings before the U. S. Senate Committee on Education and Labor on December 6, 1939. Fowler found that "156 out of the total of 180 strikes (between January 1, 1933, and July 1, 1939) have concerned the so-called field workers. Nineteen strikes have affected the canning and preserving phase of the industry, while 5 have affected sugar refining. Of the 156 strikes among field workers, 63 pertained to crops of fruits and nuts, 56 to vegetables, and 37 affected such miscellaneous crops and activities as cotton, hops, poultry, rice, wool, and dairying. Of the 63 strikes in fruit and nut crops, the citrus and peach industries were most often affected, with 15 and 11 strikes, respectively. In the vegetable classification with 56 strikes, there were 20 strikes among the pea pickers, with lettuce and celery ranking second and third with 9 and 6, respectively." (Hearings, La Follette Committee, Part 47, pp. 17208-17209.)

³The statistics for "general" strikes in California and other States are rough estimates, for reasons mentioned in Chapter I and in footnote 1 to table 3.

Labor trouble in vegetable growing was due to highly intensive and mechanized cultivation for commercial uses and, as a corollary, to the heavy demand for seasonal labor which such farming imposed upon growers. In California, furthermore, vegetable workers were usually more stable residentially and more homogeneous racially than those engaged on other crops. Mexicans predominated for many years in vegetable-growing areas of the Imperial Valley, while Mexicans and Filipinos together constituted by far most of the labor force in truck-vegetable areas of Santa Barbara, Orange, and Los Angeles Counties. Both groups had special incentives to organize and bargain collectively: they were concerned with protecting not only their occupational interests but also their rights as disadvantaged racial minorities.

Vegetable crops in California and other States, furthermore, were generally grown in close proximity to large cities and towns. Truck-farm workers correspondingly were more accessible to the influence of urban trade or industrial unions than were other agricultural laborers. This was even more true of employees in urban semi-industrialized plants, such as nurseries and greenhouses. Strikes in these two occupations together came second in number of States affected and third in total number. By far the majority of strikes in highly urbanized and industrialized States such as Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey occurred in vegetable farms, greenhouses, and nurseries. The total number of strike participants in these last two industries was less than the number in various crop strikes because the producing units were usually small.

Several factors contributed to acute labor unrest in pea crops throughout the country. Many outbreaks were prompted by the abuses suffered under the contractor system. Pea growers were often large-scale speculators who raised the crop on tracts of land which they leased from individual owners. The intensively grown and highly perishable crop required large supplies of migratory labor for a few weeks' harvesting each season. As peas were often raised in areas somewhat removed from major population centers, growers tended to rely upon agents or contractors to recruit the labor and supervise the picking operations. By this means growers were able to avoid some of the risks and burdens of management. At the same time, they freed themselves from responsibility for the welfare of their employees and often allowed exploitation to occur. The extreme susceptibility of peas to spoilage from unforeseen weather changes meant the constant risk of loss of income to labor, grower, and contractor alike; this tended to bring tension and group conflict. Pea pickers were one of the most specialized types of seasonal agricultural workers. Many of them worked only in this crop, following a cycle of pea harvests over several States. They tended to have greater cohesiveness or group consciousness than did migratory laborers who worked in a wide variety of crops, and consequently were more inclined to organize and strike.

Similar job uncertainty and friction prevailed in such crops as berries, apples, peaches, and hops, all of which suffered numerous strikes, large and small. They were generally grown in concentrated areas which required large importations of migratory labor for harvesting. There were fewer strikes among the workers in these crops than in peas, perhaps chiefly because labor contractors were less prevalent. Furthermore, such fruits and vegetables were usually grown on smaller farms. The

peach industry in California was an exception, being concentrated in large-scale orchards bordered by highways and crossroads, which rendered them accessible or vulnerable to union agitation, picketing, and strikes.

The citrus-fruit industry, which was among the leading crops in size and number of strikes, was perhaps a special case in farm-labor relations. All but one small strike among 20 in this crop occurred in California and Florida, where the structure of the industry was strikingly similar. Of all farm crops, citrus fruit was one of the most highly commercialized and integrated. Private or cooperatively owned processing concerns usually hired most of the labor and performed for passive grove owners the major functions of production and sale—growing, cultivating, “caretaking,” harvesting, packing, shipping, and marketing. Citrus-fruit workers were usually employed more continuously throughout the year than were those in other crops, and the requirements in accuracy and speed placed them in the category of semiskilled and skilled labor. In California, moreover, they had been for many years almost all of one race—Mexican.

For a long time cotton production has presented the most serious labor problem in American agriculture. Though fourth in the number of farm strikes through the Nation during the thirties, this crop was first in the number of strikers participating, with a total of almost 48,000. Six large and violent walk-outs in California alone included almost 28,000 workers. The huge scope of the cotton strikes in that State was attributed to a number of related factors. The crop employed more seasonal and migratory workers than did any other in California. Cotton farms in that State, moreover, were extraordinarily large in scale and impersonal in their labor relations. As Dr. Paul S. Taylor pointed out, California produced less than 2 percent of the Nation's cotton crop in 1929, but contained 30 percent of the Nation's large-scale cotton farms.⁴ The specific issue which provoked widespread dissatisfaction and unrest among workers in this crop (discussed in greater detail later) was the particularly one-sided bargaining relationship. Growers in California practised monopolistic wage setting through regional employers' associations. Cotton laborers became acutely aware of their disadvantaged bargaining position, particularly after years of repeated agitation and stress on the part of labor organizers. General discontent tended to flare, periodically, into overt strike action and conflict during periods of depression and wage cutting. Strikes carried out after work had begun were the only means of improving wages and other conditions, after wage scales had been determined by collective agreement among the growers beforehand. In a highly organized industry of this type, local sporadic walk-outs were obviously out of the question. They could succeed only in poorly organized crops like peas, hops, berries, and apples, in which bargaining was more individualized and competitive. Strikes in cotton were relatively few but large. They did not develop until labor unrest was acute and prevalent over an entire growing area. Once they did break out, they tended rapidly to become crop-wide or “general” in scope, involving thousands of laborers.

Extreme specialization in cotton production in the South had created serious problems of land exhaustion, chronic poverty, and dependency,

⁴Hearing of LaFollette Committee, Part 47 (p. 17224).

which in themselves discouraged farm-labor militancy. Rural unionism was further hindered by the strong racial divisions between Negro and white, and by the taboos of tradition and caste which were imposed on sharecroppers and day laborers under the plantation system. A few big strikes organized by sharecroppers' unions in the South occurred in areas where the old-style plantations were breaking down and adopting a structure similar to the large agricultural enterprises of California and Arizona. This process wrought widespread hardship and group friction in such areas as the Mississippi bottom lands of eastern Arkansas and the Black Belt of southern Alabama. Large plantations, in order to adopt mechanized production methods, uprooted their sharecroppers and tenants and hired casual day laborers for short periods of cotton "chopping" and picking.

Certain crops which were grown widely in several States experienced strikes only in California. These strikes, some of which were notably large and violent, tended to substantiate the hypothesis that the special structure and labor relations of California farming were particularly conducive to unrest. Lettuce, celery, asparagus, melons, grapes, apricots, peaches, and pears were raised in many States as part of the varied produce of small diversified farms. In California, large specialized agricultural enterprises dominated the production and sale of these crops. Lettuce, celery, and asparagus farms in that State had labor relations in some respects similar to those in the raising of vegetables and citrus fruits. The crops in certain areas were located close to urban centers—lettuce near Salinas, and celery near Stockton and Los Angeles—and the workers were subject to the stimulus of the urban labor movement. Moreover, they were more homogeneous racially than in most crops, being almost all Filipino or Mexican. Harvesting these crops, finally, required more experience than was needed for other fruits and vegetables. This served to set these workers apart as a group not easily replaceable, with a bargaining power stronger than most seasonal agricultural workers could achieve. Cutting celery, asparagus, and lettuce was in the category of semiskilled rather than unskilled labor, and the wage rates were usually higher than those paid for other seasonal harvest work. Processing jobs of packing and shipping fruits and vegetables were skilled tasks earning high rates of pay.

Field and shed workers in these crops both won collective-bargaining gains hitherto unattained in other agricultural work. Strong unionism and large strikes in fruit and vegetable industries developed as a by-product of integration and horizontal combination in business relationships. Large packing and shipping companies frequently owned or controlled a major part of the acreage and output in each special crop area. These enterprises in turn were prone to organize into producer or employer associations in order to control marketing policy and labor relations. Collective bargaining and strikes had to be industry-wide to be effective against the opposition of such highly organized employers.

Packing-shed work and field labor in celery and asparagus, as in citrus fruits, were so closely related as to be almost inseparable as collective-bargaining units. A sharper line was drawn between skilled, white, shed workers and semiskilled or unskilled, nonwhite, field labor in such crops as fresh fruits, melons and lettuce. White shed workers were the first to organize, and their unions were strong. They established a pattern of action which field workers attempted to follow. On some

occasions the two separately organized groups cooperated to carry out joint collective bargaining and sympathetic or "general" strikes.

Several crops in which strikes occurred were limited to relatively small and compact farming localities. Climatic or topographical conditions, as well as large-scale operations and special labor requirements, were important determinants. Unionism and strikes among sugar-beet workers were restricted to certain highly concentrated factory districts on the Michigan-Ohio border, the irrigated valleys of the Arkansas and South Platte Rivers in Colorado, and the Oxnard area of Ventura County in California. Strikes in sheep raising occurred almost solely in limited areas of the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast States where the industry was concentrated in large-scale ranches hiring itinerant skilled shearers. Large strikes confined to limited crop areas occurred also in the cranberry bogs of the Cape Cod region in Massachusetts, the tobacco plantations of the Connecticut Valley in Connecticut and Massachusetts, and the hop fields of Polk County and nearby areas in Oregon.

The conclusion is unavoidable that strikes were largest and most prevalent in crop areas where farming was specialized, intensive, and large-scale, and where growers depended upon large supplies of seasonal and often nonresident labor for short periods of harvesting. Labor unionism had the greatest appeal in farm industries in which grower-employers were themselves well organized to control the prices of labor and produce, and in which the labor supply was more than ordinarily homogeneous in racial composition and occupational skills.

Strike Issues

Material hardship following a severe depression was the paramount factor generating widespread labor unrest during the 1930's. The objectives of most strikes were primarily economic, as indicated by the prevalence of wage demands. Ham and Folsom estimated that wages were a source of controversy in five out of every six strikes, and were the sole issue in two out of three strikes. The influence of expanding unionism during the middle and late thirties was indicated by 37 strikes in which demands for recognition and job preference were primary. Working hours were important issues in at least 17 strikes, and working conditions in at least 14.⁵

The main issues that gave rise to California's numerous strikes in the thirties have been compiled by several Government agencies. Of 113 strikes analyzed by the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 60 involving 42,317 workers concerned wages and hours as the major issues, while 34 involving 36,902 workers concerned recognition and discrimination in employment.⁶ These included a number of strikes in urbanized processing industries. A more accurate picture of labor trouble in field agriculture is furnished in a sample of 96 farm strikes in California reported by the U. S. Bureau of Agricultural Economics during 1933-38. Issues regarding wages, hours, and working conditions caused 63 strikes or almost two-thirds of the total; wages, hours, and recognition caused 14; recognition alone caused 7; organizational issues caused 4; and miscellaneous or unknown issues caused 8.⁶

⁵Testimony of William T. Ham and Josiah C. Folsom, at Hearings of La Follette Committee, May 8, 1940.

⁶Hearings of LaFollette Committee, Part 47 (p. 17211).

Organized workers tended to be preoccupied with basic economic demands in a field of employment in which labor's bargaining power was weak and annual earnings were among the lowest of any occupation. Minimum-wage standards and other protective labor legislation passed by State and Federal Governments were almost completely lacking for this group. Unionism in most fields of agriculture was a new development in the thirties, and labor organizations lasted for more than one season in only a few crop areas. Advanced union demands, such as closed shop, union hiring halls, seniority preference, maximum hours, and overtime rates, became paramount strike issues chiefly in well-organized processing industries that employed skilled white labor.

Violence in Strikes

Agricultural workers who organized unions and participated in strikes were subjected frequently to legal and extra-legal intimidation and violence. Suppression of many kinds could be employed safely against an occupational group which was heterogeneous in composition, low in social status, weak in bargaining power, poorly paid, lacking in political influence, and denied the benefits of protective labor legislation. Many tenants, sharecroppers, and laborers in Southern States were prevented from voting, under State poll taxes and Jim Crow laws. Seasonal farm workers in California and other States were politically impotent because large numbers were disfranchised by their alien citizenship or their inability to maintain a stable residence which the right to vote required. Hence they could count on little protection from elected representatives of the law in communities where they worked for short periods of time. Local residents and law-enforcement agencies usually sided with grower-employers. They tended to be violently opposed to unionism and strikes because of the high perishability of farm crops, and the alleged irresponsibility of casual and migratory laborers.

Agricultural strikes, largest and most numerous in California, were most highly publicized and investigated there by newspapers, private research organizations, and government agencies. The record of farm-labor unrest on the whole was one of turmoil, violence, illegality, and infringement of civil liberties.

In a summary presented before the U. S. Senate Committee on Education and Labor, Henry H. Fowler reported a total of 65 strikes involving civil and criminal disturbances in agricultural and allied industries, affecting 30 counties in California from January 1, 1933, to July 1, 1939. Fourteen violent strikes (a number of them in processing industries) occurred during the peak year 1937. Strikes among field workers alone reached their peak in 1933. The manifestations of turmoil in these strikes were numerous and varied:

Arrests were made in 39 out of 65 strikes. Riots, violence, and injuries occurred in 32 strikes. Use of munitions marked 16 strikes. Ranking fourth in frequency are evictions and deportations, which took place in 15 instances. Other types of disturbances include 11 strikes involving property damage, 10 involving intimidation, 8 involving vigilante action, and 5 involving death. Again it should be observed that these are only the instances in the press; undoubtedly the information is far from complete. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 47, p. 17212.)

This picture of California's agriculture should not obscure the seriousness of the less-frequent outbreaks in other farm areas. In propor-

tion to numbers involved, the tactics of combat indicating frictional labor relations appear to have been employed even more intensely, although less widely, in other States. Various farm areas which adopted California's methods of crop production also acquired its pattern of agricultural labor relations.

Violent disturbances and legal suppression were employed most widely in industries and crops which experienced the largest, most numerous, and long-sustained strikes. These conflict situations tended to develop when grower-employers were well organized in both the produce and labor markets, so that militant unionism seemed to be the only effective means by which labor could win economic gains. The agricultural strikes which brought the most violence and death in California and the Nation as a whole occurred among the cotton workers. The most long-sustained conflicts between highly organized employers and employees developed among those in lettuce and in fruit and vegetable canning.

Violence and legal suppression often accompanied strikes occurring in very perishable crops, such as peas, peaches, hops, and apples, employing highly migratory labor groups. These laborers usually were too unstable and precarious in economic status to be strongly organized. Neither they nor their employers could afford long-continued strikes, and hence the issues usually were settled by quick victory or quick defeat.

Strikebreaking and Legal Restriction

Anti-unionism and strikebreaking were spontaneous in most areas. Short-lived protective associations, vigilante committees, and sometimes merely unplanned mob action tended to develop where farm strikes threatened to ruin crops and thus destroy part of a community's income. Permanent, anti-union employers' associations in agriculture were organized only in States on the Pacific Coast where farm-labor unionism was a long-sustained and continuous social movement. The seriousness of farm-labor unrest in California and neighboring States also brought forth special effort to control strikes through legislative means in that region.

The violence reached in agricultural strikes aroused in many quarters opposition to the wholesale suppression of civil liberties. The traditionally western institution known as "vigilantism" had been designed originally as the respectable citizens' method for maintaining order and protection of property when the established forces of the law had been found inadequate. It lost a good deal of its romantic aura when employed by powerful economic interests against laborers who lacked even the normal amount of security and legal status.

As was disclosed in the Senate hearings already mentioned, employers' organizations like the Associated Farmers of California had been formed to break farm-labor unionism and suppress strikes by means of more or less "direct action." In time such organizations came to rely increasingly upon local forces of law and order. Branches of the Associated Farmers in many counties established themselves as groups from which county sheriffs could choose the required number of deputies in case of strikes. In this way force could be applied against the strikers, but in a more disciplined and strictly legal fashion.

The Associated Farmers and allied organizations at the same time attempted to create a more favorable public opinion and pressed for legislation that would curb labor unionism in agriculture. They were remarkably successful because the organized weight of resident property owners tended to be paramount in county elections. By the late thirties no less than 31 of California's 58 counties, covering a major portion of all agricultural areas in the State, had passed antipicketing ordinances. Henry H. Fowler summarized the main prohibitory clauses incorporated in these ordinances:

* * * Obstruction of any public passageway prohibited in 27 counties; use of language, noise, or gestures in 9 counties; picketing for the purpose of inducing others to quit work or not to seek employment in 18 counties; picketing with the intent of inducing persons to boycott a place of business in 17 counties; obstruction of any public entrance or approach in 17 counties. A \$500 maximum fine and/or 6 months imprisonment is the penalty in 26 counties. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 47, p. 17213.)

The Associated Farmers of California was not so successful on a State-wide and regional scale. State Associated Farmers units were organized in Arizona, Oregon, and Washington, and joined forces in a "Pacific Coast hook-up." In cooperation with other anti-union employer associations and sympathizers the Associated Farmers in California, Oregon, and Washington sponsored a referendum for a popular vote to enact State antipicketing laws. The measure failed to pass in California and Washington, but was enacted as State law in Oregon.

The Associated Farmers also acted nationally to influence Federal Government policy. It cooperated with other employer interests in lobbies and pressure groups to agitate for the exemption of labor in agriculture and allied industries from the provisions of such Federal labor legislation as the Social Security Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and the National Labor Relations Act. The last named, in particular, alarmed agricultural employers, as its jurisdiction had extended to several important processing industries and thus allowed unions to gain a foothold in these fields.

Mediation and Arbitration

Many attempts were made to lessen the intensity of labor-employer conflict in agriculture. Federal, State, and county government bodies as well as various private groups continually sought to settle strike issues by mediation and, in a few cases, arbitration. Their efforts were not marked with success in most instances. Their main value in the long run, perhaps, was in bringing controversial issues to the attention of the public and thus indirectly lessening the intransigence of the contending parties.

Mediators faced formidable difficulties in agriculture because protective labor legislation was almost completely absent. They met with deep suspicion from both employers and employees. The growers in particular had a tendency to oppose outside intervention because mediation and arbitration of disputes implied a certain recognition of collective bargaining and unionism among laborers. Farm employer spokesmen in the early thirties justified their position mainly on the grounds that agricultural unions were Communist dominated. Later they opposed just as strongly any recognition or mediation of disputes with full-fledged organizations affiliated with the A.F. of L. and C.I.O., on the ground

that labor unionism in itself was a menace to an industry producing commodities as perishable as farm crops.

Mediation and arbitration, lacking compulsory sanction, could do little of real value in settling strikes satisfactorily. In most cases one of the contending parties was too weak to enforce upon the other the provisions accepted in a settlement. Outside intervention was most successful (for short periods at least) in preventing or settling strikes in which the contending parties were both relatively well organized.

The turbulence of farm-labor strikes in California aroused persons in many quarters to demand official intervention. Some experts favored the establishment of permanent arbitration boards to which employers and employees could submit their disputes at any time. Such arrangements would prevent losses from strikes and lock-outs when agreements could not be reached voluntarily. Various points of view were represented in a symposium held by the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco on the question of "A Farm Labor Disputes Board?" Profs. Paul S. Taylor and R. L. Adams of the University of California favored establishment of such an institution, created in advance of and without reference to any particular disputes but ready to arbitrate any that developed. Their views found support from agricultural labor-union representatives and the majority of the club's members.⁷

Representatives of organized grower-employers, however, were doubtful or antagonistic in their attitude.⁸ John F. Pickett, editor of the Pacific Rural Press, expressed his views in no uncertain terms:

* * * May I say bluntly so that it may be more emphatic, that I feel the proposal to set up a permanent farm labor disputes board would be considered by agriculture as an impertinence and cowardly, as seeming to attend to somebody else's business and neglecting their own. (The Commonwealth, December 1936, p. 252.)

Most grower-employers and labor-union representatives, as well as impartial observers, agreed that the prevailing methods of mediation were on the whole inadequate for settling the problem of agricultural strikes. Mediators were generally unfamiliar with specific labor conditions and strike issues, and their problems were complicated by the strong feelings of contending groups. These were serious obstacles, particularly because of the brief duration of most agricultural strikes. As pointed out by one prominent grower-employer, Roy M. Pike, manager of El Solyo Ranch: "Perishable crops do not lend themselves to mediation because they must be handled in two or three days of their ripening and cannot await meetings and drawn-out decision."⁹

Public interest in the subject declined during the late thirties, as agricultural strikes decreased in number, scope, and violence.

⁷The Commonwealth (Official Journal of the Commonwealth Club of California). Vol. XII, No. 51, San Francisco, Calif., December 1936 (p. 234).

⁸Idem (pp. 252-254).

⁹Idem (p. 242).

CHAPTER V.—Large-Scale Agriculture and Early Farm-Labor Unionism in California

Industrialized Agriculture

The preceding chapters have indicated that labor-employer conflict in agriculture, particularly during the turbulent thirties, was concentrated to a disproportionate degree in California. Many studies of farm-labor problems in this State have been made by scholars, research experts, government agencies, and others. Most of their findings have been assembled in Hearings and Reports of the Subcommittee of the U. S. Senate Committee on Education and Labor investigating Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor. Facts brought out in these studies substantiate the hypothesis formulated in the previous chapter, namely, that disturbed labor relations are a product of a type of farm structure that has reached its fullest development in California.

The pattern of land ownership and operation which developed earliest and most extensively in California has been termed "factory farming" or "industrialized agriculture."¹ Its most obvious attributes have been an extraordinarily large scale of operation, extreme specialization, and a high degree of mechanization. Agricultural enterprises of this type began early in California because its land, since the beginning of settlement by early Spanish and Mexican colonists, had been owned, controlled, and administered in huge units. Large-scale farming remained dominant during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries as new crops and methods of production were adopted to meet the demands of new and expanding markets. Crops were grown more intensively, heavy capital investments were required for additional farm equipment and land improvements, and more labor was required per acre.

Certain topographical and climatic features favored concentration in specialized large-scale farm production in this State and contributed to the peculiar nature of its labor problems. The land suitable for farming lies in a long strip running north and south for several hundred miles, bounded by the Pacific Ocean on the west and high mountain ranges to the east. Valley land along such rivers as the Sacramento and the San Joaquin was particularly fertile, and new farm land was continuously being made available through irrigation. Climatic differences in California from the Mexican border north to Oregon encouraged the cultivation of a wide variety of crops maturing at different months of the year, and each area tended to concentrate on growing one or a few products.

Intensive specialized farming, as stressed before, requires adequate supplies of mobile seasonal labor available at the periods of peak demand. By the time rural California had become largely a series of special crop areas, almost the entire agricultural economy was dependent upon a variably sized body of casual and migratory laborers who, in order to find continuous employment, had to dovetail brief jobs over a region encompassing many counties and sometimes several States. Differences

¹Cf. Report of La Follette Committee, Part III: The Disadvantaged Status of Unorganized Labor in California's Industrialized Agriculture.

in status and attitude between employer and employee were widened to an extreme degree by the unusual size of many farming enterprises, the high proportion of casual workers in the farm population, and the extreme mobility of these workers. On large farms they were generally employed as members of gangs or crews to perform standardized repetitive tasks. Mass production in the large-scale California agricultural enterprise, in the words of one expert, "brought about what may be called the mechanization of the human element in the industry."²

In agriculture, wages, hours, conditions of work, living facilities, and, above all, job security, have long been far below the standards generally applying to other industries in California. Seasonality precluded the security to be gained through permanence of employment. Haphazard hiring methods and uncontrolled individual and group migrations made job security through seniority preference or other such arrangements almost impossible to achieve. Low income, intermittent employment, and high mobility imposed the discomforts of poverty—inadequate housing, deficiencies in food, lack of educational and medical facilities, and the like.

The exceedingly low social status and standards of living of casual and migratory workers served to set them off as a distinct caste. Legally, however, they continued to be looked upon as enjoying more than ordinary security and personal solicitude from their employers. Hence, more than any other occupational group, they were denied the benefits of social legislation and protection of their civil liberties.

This seriously disadvantaged position drove agricultural workers in this State periodically to organize and strike against their employers. Hardship alone was not sufficient cause for their taking organized action. On the contrary, their extremely precarious economic position was apt to preclude the growth of strong unionism. Historically, labor unrest in California has not always been most widespread when farm wages and working conditions were worst. Also, though the most militant farm-labor movements developed in that State, the standards of wages and employment there have usually been above those of other intensive farming regions.

The striking inequalities between farm employers and employees and the wide margin between rural and urban labor standards appear to have been the most important factors contributing to labor unrest in California's agriculture. Low wages became a source of widespread complaint and a stimulus to organized protest when they were enforced by the superior bargaining power of large and well-financed employers. This was particularly true when growers in certain crop areas cooperated among themselves in order to fix wages and recruit labor.

The trade-union movement had become strongly established in several cities and towns of California during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and many urban trades were better paid in that State than elsewhere. Contact with industrial labor groups whose economic status had been raised through collective bargaining gave agricultural workers a strong and continuous incentive to unionize. Periodically they attempted to transplant to the rural scene the structure and tactics of established urban trade-unions.

²Wells A. Sherman, Chief Marketing Specialist of the U. S. Bureau of Agricultural Economics, quoted in testimony by Dr. Paul S. Taylor, Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 47 (p. 17228).

Farm-labor unions usually met with more than ordinary hostility and violence from grower-employers and their sympathizers in California, as was pointed out in Chapter IV. Wages are almost the only variable cost which farm employers feel they can revise to meet fluctuating economic conditions; and they usually constitute a more significant proportion of total costs for large, specialized agricultural enterprises than for small diversified farms. Absolute control over wage rates, free from intervention by outside agencies, the growers thus deem essential.

Agricultural employers, moreover, constantly fear heavy losses because of the perishability of many crops. Labor unionism and strikes constitute further risks in addition to wind and weather. In contrast to most urban industries, a crop loss represents not merely current output, but investments for an entire season or even a year. A spokesman of the California Fruit Growers and Farmers summed up the situation as follows:

The problems of farm labor are so different from those of industry, that, while we farmers have no quarrel with the aims of the legitimate industrial labor unions, we would regard the unionization of farm labor, under existing conditions, as absolutely ruinous to us as well as to the laborers themselves.

The main differences, as almost all of you know, are as follows:

1. Owing to the perishable nature of his crop, a farmer cannot afford to have his harvesting delayed, while negotiating with strikers.

(x) A week's delay, or in some cases 2 days' delay, will destroy his whole year's income and the much larger amount he has spent in producing the crop.

(y) The labor agitators always plan to call their strikes at the most critical stages of the harvesting.³

The causes of the acute labor problems which California's agriculture faces lie far back in the history of the State. Large-scale farms growing intensive cash crops for distant markets had become numerous by the third quarter of the nineteenth century, and the low-paid migratory seasonal laborers who harvested the crops were already an important and identifiable occupational class in the population. Once established, this agricultural system tended to be self-perpetuating. Land values rose as more and more capital was invested in improvements, machinery, and other equipment required for intensive cultivation. High land values were derived from the capitalization of large net profits, actual and potential, which the land could earn. Profitability of the land, in turn, depended in no small measure upon low labor costs. Large and continuous supplies of cheap mobile labor then became an outright necessity if the established agricultural system was not to be disorganized or transformed drastically. Farms burdened with large fixed or overhead costs imposed by highly capitalized land values could continue to operate profitably only as long as adequate numbers of low-paid seasonal workers were available.⁴

For several decades California growers have been preoccupied, periodically, with the search for new sources of labor. Inferior wages and working conditions constantly impelled agricultural workers to seek employment in other industries when they had the opportunity, and their places had to be filled by new recruits. For the past 70 years or more these have been drawn from successive waves of low-paid racial and cul-

³Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 47 (p. 17219).

⁴For a fuller discussion of this subject see Varden Fuller: *The Supply of Agricultural Labor as a Factor in the Evolution of Farm Organization in California*, published in Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 54 (p. 19802).

tural groups.⁵ Chinese came first, followed more or less chronologically by Japanese, Hindustani, Mexicans, Filipinos, and a minority of other elements including the native white American "hobo" of the type studied by Carlton Parker.⁶

Each racial group in time acquired some of the techniques and standards established by urban workers. In California, farm workers of almost every race have participated in strikes and attempted to organize unions at one time or another. Periodically, the farm-labor movement took the form of organized race conflict.

The Chinese and Race Conflict in Agriculture

Labor unionism and organized conflict in a primitive form first appeared on a significant scale in rural California when the Chinese became an important part of the agricultural labor supply. They were mobile, efficient, and available in large numbers at wages much below the ordinary urban standards, and were an important factor enabling large farms to convert from intensive grain crops and livestock to intensive fruit and vegetable growing.⁷

As a racial minority excluded from other industries and subject to considerable intimidation from the white community, the Chinese in agriculture were not in a position to organize unions for collective bargaining. In fact, their industriousness and lack of militancy made them the more desirable as employees. Like other immigrant groups in later years, however, the Chinese developed an indigenous form of labor organization which they transplanted to rural areas. Quite early, in San Francisco and other urban centers, they had formed native "brotherhoods" or "protective associations" known as tongs. The California Bureau of Labor Statistics in its Third Biennial Report for 1888 (p. 84) described these as a type of "trade-unions" which "are very rarely heard of, but nevertheless exist and are very powerful. In case of a strike or boycott they are fierce and determined in their action, making a bitter and prolonged fight."

Although some organized strikes took place among Chinese workers in urban trades during these early years, there is little to indicate that similar developments of any importance arose in rural areas.⁸

The tong became, instead of a labor union, a type of employment agency which facilitated the recruiting and hiring of Chinese for seasonal jobs requiring considerable mobility. It was a forerunner of the labor-contractor system which became more firmly established among other racial groups. This system, as first developed among the Chinese, involved a division of the entrepreneurial functions of hiring and firing between the grower-employer and a representative of the labor group.

⁵See Paul S. Taylor and Tom Vasey: *Historical Background of California Farm Labor*, in *Rural Sociology*, Vol. I, No. 3, September 1936 (pp. 289-295).

⁶Carlton Parker: *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays*, New York, 1920.

⁷Fuller, *op. cit.*, Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 54 (pp. 19802-19811).

⁸One strike of Chinese demanding higher wages was reported in 1884. It involved a "large force" of hop pickers on the Haggin Grant in Kern County. In this case employers planned to replace the Chinese with Negroes, but the latter were found to be too inexperienced. (*Pacific Rural Press*, Aug. 30, 1884, p. 164.)

A limited and short-lived union of Chinese agricultural workers was noted in 1890, but was regarded somewhat lightly. The *California Fruit Grower* in its August 23, 1890, issue made passing reference to " * * * a Chinese labor union and its \$1.50 per day demand for work in the orchards and vineyards."

The latter, as contractor, customarily received a flat sum from the grower for the work of the laborers he represented. From this he paid each individual worker a wage agreed upon beforehand. As the system developed later, the contractor was often allowed a certain amount by grower-employers for each laborer he recruited. Sometimes he made an additional profit by furnishing supplies or room and board to the crew.

Many abuses developed from time to time under this system, because of the many opportunities open to the contractor to exploit his less-sophisticated labor force.⁹ As first developed, however, it offered the most suitable means for the occupational adjustment of unassimilated groups, with tangible advantages to both parties in the wage bargain. Like the *padrone* system in the industrial Northeast, the labor-contractor arrangement prevailed when a language barrier existed between employer and employees. For workers who were unable to speak English adequately and were as yet unfamiliar with the labor market in which they dealt, there were obvious gains in leaving the necessary business arrangements of job finding to a more sophisticated and experienced member who could act as official spokesman. The system constituted a type of collective bargaining in a semi-union form of organization.

There were tangible advantages in this labor relationship for grower-employers also. Their persistent preference for nonwhite labor was explained in large part by the fact that whites seldom worked under a contractor. Workers were more readily available when the employer, to recruit the labor supply he needed for a certain job, had only to contact the "Chinese boss" or "head man" and specify the number of men wanted, where they were needed, and when. The grower was relieved of almost all administrative or supervisory duties of hiring, firing, or even paying the men individually, since all negotiations were carried on through one bargaining agent. It was not necessary to provide board for the working crew (as it generally was for whites) and the most meager housing was usually accepted. After the harvesting operations were over, the crew would leave for other seasonal jobs or return to the cities to subsist on their "stakes."¹⁰

The first instances of organized labor-employer conflict or the "labor movement" in California agriculture began in the form of race riots rather than of unions organized for carrying on collective bargaining. Anti-Oriental agitation gave the trade-union movement in urban centers a heightened cohesiveness and unity of purpose. In small towns and nearby rural areas it stimulated a degree of collective action which at that time was unusual among small farmers and agricultural laborers. Throughout the late 1880's and 1890's the Chinese were subjected to increasing violence and intimidation. Their emigration in large numbers to rural areas brought a pattern of race relations earlier established in such cities as San Francisco.

⁹The United States Industrial Commission in 1901 reported that—"Hundreds of coolie laborers brought into this country by the vicious 'high-binder' tongs were hired out as 'gangs' under the supervision of 'bosses,' who in turn collected the wage of the laborers and turned the greater part over to some company of the highbinder." (Office of the United States Industrial Commission, Report to Congress, December 5, 1901.)

However, the coolie system of recruiting labor was not prevalent in agriculture as it had been earlier in railroad construction. Most of the workers on farms had already paid their indebtedness to the various labor-recruiting companies and were thus free to seek work where they pleased. With increasing knowledge and experience of individual members, the opportunity for exploitation decreased. (Final Report, Commission on Industrial Relations, Vol. 5, pp. 4941, 4950.)

¹⁰Fuller, in *Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 54* (p. 19811).

As early as 1877 farmers were reported to have received anonymous notes warning them to cease employing Chinese.¹¹ Isolated instances of violence against Chinese in rural areas occurred throughout the period of anti-Oriental agitation in cities. No organized opposition to their employment in agriculture appeared until several years later.

General business depression and unemployment from 1883 to 1887 led to considerable labor ferment throughout the United States. The year 1885 witnessed a virtual epidemic of strikes in many States of the Union. Labor unrest spread to agricultural areas, particularly in California, where it was manifested chiefly in the form of anti-Oriental agitation.¹² Unemployment in urban industries drove many city laborers, white as well as Chinese, to seek work on farms, and there the competition for jobs and the resulting wage cuts fanned the flames of race conflict. Violence against Chinese became more frequent and widespread, and boycotts directed against growers employing them were organized in many districts. By 1886 this anti-Oriental movement had become sufficiently serious to impel grower-employers to organize strong measures in self-defense. In such districts as Vacaville, Mendocino, Petaluma, Newcastle, Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, and Sacramento, hop growers, fruit growers, canners, and sympathetic local businessmen called special meetings and in a few cases established protective organizations.¹³ The Fruit Growers and Citizens Defense Association of Santa Clara County was organized in April 1886, for the purpose of resisting organized boycotts and preventing interference with the Chinese labor supply.¹⁴ At a meeting of hop and fruit growers in Grangers Hall in Sacramento in the same month, the boycott of Chinese was "discussed and condemned." Rifles were suggested as a means for handling the boycotters, portrayed as "unemployed who won't work." Said one spokesman:

If you discharge your Chinamen and employ white men you cannot depend upon your help at all. They will not work in the berry patch, the hop yard, or the fruit orchard so long as they can drive the header or follow the thresher. (*Pacific Rural Press*, April 3, 1886, p. 332.)

Anti-Chinese agitation abated temporarily toward the end of 1886, as industry began to revive and surplus white laborers were reemployed in cities and towns. Scattered instances of labor trouble and race conflict during the next few years dealt more directly with economic issues connected with strikes.¹⁵ A strike of white grape pickers was reported as early as 1887.¹⁶ In 1888 a small group of white strikers on a sugar-beet ranch operated by the Spreckels Co. forced a minority of Chinese to cease working also. As reported in the *Pacific Rural Press* of June 9, 1888, a crew of 25 white boys collectively demanded wage rates equal to those being paid a crew of 14 Chinese, viz, \$1.15 to \$1.25 per day. When the employer refused, the whites went on strike and stoned the Chinese, who fled the fields until the strikers left.

The relatively peaceful conditions incidental to prosperity and full employment were temporary. Again, during the 1890's, the tide of anti-Chinese sentiment swept through rural areas. Organized boycotts and

¹¹*Pacific Rural Press*, Vol. XIII, June 30, 1877 (p. 408).

¹²*Idem*, March 7, 1885.

¹³See *Pacific Rural Press*, issues of February 27, 1886 (pp. 196, 197, 209), March 13, 1886 (p. 278), and April 3, 1886 (p. 332).

¹⁴*Idem*, April 24, 1886 (p. 412).

¹⁵David Lubin, in a letter published in the *Pacific Rural Press* of August 18, 1888, regarding labor troubles on California ranches, blamed them on the employment of "coolies," on "gruffness" of employers, and on generally poor working conditions.

¹⁶Reports of Senate Committee on Immigration, 1911, Part 25, Vol. II (p. 229).

violent mob action grew in intensity. One writer even claimed that "a condition approximating civil war broke out in the great valleys of California."¹⁷

Basic to this conflict, as in the previous instance of 1886, was the chronic unemployment brought by Nation-wide industrial stagnation. The labor supply in agriculture was increased to the point of superabundance throughout the nineties.¹⁸ Unemployed whites were placed in direct competition with Chinese and, increasingly, with newly arrived Japanese who were forced to resort to wage cutting in order to obtain employment. Racial antipathies were sharpened. Drastic wage reductions were put into effect in many agricultural areas during 1893 and 1894, leading to a series of riots and race conflicts.

Beginning in August 1893, in the vicinity of Fresno, some 300 Chinese field laborers were driven from their work by white men. Rioting soon became general in the San Joaquin Valley, centering in the vicinities of Tulare, Visalia, and Fresno. A white laborers' union in Napa Valley was organized as a result of a mass meeting held to protest the employment of Chinese in prune orchards. In the vicinity of Compton in southern California, "hoodlums" joined by sailors and longshoremen from San Pedro were reported to have raided fields and driven out the Chinese. Night raiders in Redlands, heart of the citrus belt, broke into Chinese camps. Rioting became so acute, according to one writer, that the National Guard was summoned and 200 special deputy sheriffs were sworn in. The disturbances spread farther north and culminated in a major outbreak at Ukiah.¹⁹

The turmoil continued on a smaller scale the following year. In February 1894, a gang of Chinese brought into Anaheim to pick oranges was driven out by organized mobs of whites. Subsequently another gang was brought in under police guard.²⁰ In Vacaville a mob calling itself the "Industrial Army" terrorized Japanese and Chinese. According to the Sacramento Record Union of May 18, 1894, "the county is aroused, and will assert its right to have its employees continue undisturbed in their ranch work." A few days later citizens were reported to be arming themselves to protect their Oriental labor.²¹ In August a "large crowd of white men" was reported to have driven a hundred Chinese from their work at a packing house in Santa Rosa.²² Again, in November 1894, the Pacific Rural Press reported that "vandalism" had broken out in the Vaca Valley as "marauding tramps, 150 in a bunch, organized in squads with captains and lieutenants," raided orchards, cut down fruit trees, and drove out Chinese and Japanese laborers.²³

Anti-Oriental agitation and conflict diminished later in the decade, as business conditions improved and the farm-labor surplus decreased through rapid reemployment in city industries. The position of the Chinese in agriculture improved considerably, as their numbers were limited by immigration restrictions and as opposition to their employment in other trades relaxed. According to the California Bureau of Labor Statistics in its Ninth Biennial Report for 1899-1900 (p. 15):

¹⁷Carey McWilliams: *Factories in the Fields*, New York, 1939 (p. 74).

¹⁸The Pacific Rural Press in April 1894, for example, reported that it was easier to get men at 50 to 75 cents per day than it formerly had been at \$1. (Pacific Rural Press, Apr. 7, 1894, pp. 264, 265.)

¹⁹McWilliams, *op. cit.* (p. 75).

²⁰Pacific Rural Press, March 3, 1894 (p. 174).

²¹*Idem*, May 24, 1894.

²²*Idem*, August 18, 1894 (p. 100).

²³*Idem*, November 17, 1894; December 1, 1894 (p. 338).

Relieved by the operation of the Exclusion Act in great measure from the pressing competition of his fellow-countrymen, the Chinese worker was not slow to take advantage of his circumstances and demand in exchange for his labor a higher price and, as time went on, even becoming Americanized to the extent of enforcing such demands, in some cases, through the medium of labor organization * * * hence * * * the question of his competition with the other labor of the State has lost much of its importance.

Labor Organization Among the Japanese

Towards the turn of the century an acute labor scarcity existed in every fruit district in the State. Even with advances in wage rates of 25 percent, 50 percent, and sometimes 100 percent, labor was not always available to harvest fruit as well as grain, hops, hay, and dairy products.²⁴ The deficiency was soon rectified by a large influx of Japanese, whose numbers had been growing steadily during the nineties. It is almost impossible to overestimate the crucial importance of this element in buttressing the large-scale farming economy of the State at that time. In the opinion of Fuller—

Their labor enabled the perpetuation of an organizational structure which had been founded with the Chinese. In the interval between plentiful Chinese and Japanese labor, the structure had been maintained by depression-opportunity whites. The Japanese came at a strategic moment of prosperity-opportunity for the local whites and carried the system through until recurring depression again gave it security. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 54, p. 19840.)

It was primarily in field, garden, and orchard work that Japanese first appeared. The demand for their services was heightened by the rapid expansion of such crops as sugar beets, rice, and strawberries. By 1898, according to the Industrial Commission on Immigration,²⁵ the Japanese were doing most of the work in beets and were rapidly monopolizing the work in berry cultivation. By 1909 the U.S. Senate Committee on Immigration²⁶ found that Japanese farm workers constituted some 30,000, and were the most important labor group in almost all types of intensive cultivation. In the southern citrus areas they constituted half to three-fourths of all seasonally employed workers, and in sugar beets, about two-thirds. They were dominant to almost the same degree in melons, celery, hops, and other crops requiring considerable amounts of hand labor.²⁶

At first the Japanese, like the Chinese before them, were favored as employees because of their relative cheapness and docility. When first introduced into agricultural labor, they not only underbid white laborers, but at the outset they even worked for less than the Chinese and Hindustani. During the late eighties they had been used on some occasions to break strikes by white workers.²⁷ When jobs became scarce during the 1890's, they took the initiative in reducing wage rates. According to the Pacific Rural Press, a gang of Japanese was working in Santa Clara County for 50 cents per day without board, where previously the rates for Chinese had been \$1 per day and for whites \$1.25 to \$1.75.²⁸ During 1896 the Japanese competed with Chinese in the sugar-beet fields of the Pajaro Valley, reducing the contract price from \$1.20 to 75 cents per

²⁴Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 54 (p. 19819).

²⁵Reports, Industrial Commission, Vol. 15, 1901.

²⁶Reports, Senate Committee on Immigration, 1911, Vol. 24 (pp. 20-23).

²⁷Idem, Part 25, Vol. II (p. 229).

²⁸Pacific Rural Press, April 7, 1894 (p. 264).

ton.²⁹ According to Fuller, however, the relation of the Japanese to the Chinese was one of replacement rather than displacement. Japanese competed with other labor groups, particularly in the southern citrus area where Chinese had not penetrated. In consequence, there were periodic outbreaks of anti-Japanese sentiment from Mexicans and whites in this area.³⁰

Like the Chinese before them, the Japanese became established in various crops by organizing themselves into gangs which dealt through one spokesman. This made their labor more available and convenient to grower-employers, for whom it facilitated the problem of recruiting and hiring an adequate labor supply for temporary jobs of harvesting. Like the Chinese also, the Japanese had the additional virtue of providing their own food and housing, thus avoiding intrusion on the family life of the employer. The advantages to the growers in this system were stressed by Clemens Horst, large-scale hop raiser, in testimony before the Commission on Industrial Relations in 1915:

You deal with one Hindu, who will furnish you the whole crew. You go to the Japanese and they will furnish you with a hundred or two hundred, and you go to the one man and he will furnish the number of men. You go to a Chinaman, and he will do the same thing, furnish any number you want.³¹

White workers, on the other hand, were more disorganized and unreliable, according to Mr. Horst:

*** you don't know which lots of whites are going to stay [through the season]. If there could be some method devised that they could be made to stay and you wouldn't have to change around all the time, the employers' position would be very much better.³²

For the laborers, job finding was facilitated when one of their number specialized in locating work; this enabled them to dovetail a series of seasonal jobs through a greater part of the year. The origins of this system and its subsequent developments were portrayed by Yamoto Ichihashi in his book, *Japanese in the United States*.³²

*** In 1892 a Japanese, Kimura, along with a dozen Oriental laborers, arrived in Watsonville. The following year he organized what he termed a club for his followers, as well as for others now entering the district.

*** These were early organized among the Japanese in the nineties to provide cheap lodging and boarding facilities, and to effect easy and inexpensive migration for work and to "hibernate" successfully. The organizations were sometimes simply groupings of laborers under a "boss" who carried on the business of finding jobs, supervising the workers, and providing cooking and living quarters, with a secretary who arranged for jobs on a commission basis, for which dues were charged. "Camps" organized and run by bosses for their own benefit were formed, functioning much as did clubs. These organizations greatly simplified job finding, as farmers and laborers alike used these facilities.

*** In time this club became a general rendezvous for the Japanese in the district, and when employers needed extra hands they went to the club and secured the men they wanted. Advantages of the club were soon recognized by other Japanese leaders. Thus another came into being in 1899. When the writer visited the town in 1908, there were four of these clubs with a total membership of 650 in this district, roughly embracing 100 square miles. Each club had a secretary whose function it was to find jobs and arrange them so that its members could work most advantageously. His compensation consisted of a 5 cent commission collected from each man per day, but he had no fixed salary. When the demand for the

²⁹Report of Senate Committee on Immigration, 1911, Vol. 24 (p. 27).

³⁰Fuller, in Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 54 (p. 19830).

³¹Senate Documents, Vol. 23, No. 6933 (64th Cong., 1st Sess.) 1915-16. Commission on Industrial Relations, Reports, Vol. 5 (p. 4922).

³²London, Oxford Press, 1932 (pp. 172-174).

men was more than the members could supply, he sought outsiders, who obtained jobs by paying him the same commission. These outsiders were not given the privileges of the club, and remained at boarding houses run for profit. However, anyone could join the club by paying the \$5 annual dues, and avail himself of its privileges.

When the season of the district began to slacken, the "outsider" first withdrew, and some of its members migrated whenever it was found advantageous to work elsewhere. To assist these migratory members, the secretary studied the situation in the neighboring districts, if he did not know them already; in fact, he often arranged with employers of such districts for the employment of his members before [they] were allowed to move, and in this case he collected his 5 cent commission. More often, however, in order to obtain accurate information from the latter, he communicated with the bosses of such localities, who were more than glad to furnish the information because they had to secure a labor force fluctuating with the seasonal needs of their respective districts. When the men secured their jobs through the bosses, they paid their 5 cent commission to them and not to the secretary. Thus the club members kept going from industry to industry and from place to place until there were no more jobs. Then they returned to their clubs to spend the winter, doing such casual jobs as they would pick up in their residential district.

In time the relationship between bosses and workers became more casual. Often several bosses became associated as contractors, and they in turn employed and directed the general rank-and-file laborers. With the completion of any given unit of work, the labor gang would disband and scatter, and succeeding jobs would be performed under new contractors and under different terms.³³ By 1910, according to the *Pacific Rural Press* in its issue of June 11—

The Japanese control and domination of labor in orchards, vineyards, gardens, and sugar-beet fields in California has been accomplished by the persistent operation and State expansion of the boss system.

The Japanese soon lost their docility once they had come to dominate the labor market in various crop areas. Their contractor system of organization was utilized as an instrument for militant collective bargaining. Employed primarily for harvesting operations, they were prone to put pressure on the employer when he was most vulnerable and subject to maximum loss in case of a strike—just when the crop was ripe and in highly perishable condition. It was generally conceded, according to the California Bureau of Labor Statistics, that the Japanese were merciless once they had their employer at a disadvantage. They would work for cheap wages until competition was eliminated and then strike for higher wages. It was charged by growers that when Japanese found their employers in need of help, "they will strike without any provocation, simply to get an increase, regardless of agreement."³⁴ Proceedings of the 1907 convention of the California Fruit Growers (1907, p. 69) expressed the increasing dissatisfaction of grower-employers with Japanese, and a strong nostalgia for the more tractable Chinese of earlier days:

The Chinese when they were here were ideal. They were patient, plodding, and uncomplaining in the performance of the most menial service. They submitted to anything, never violating a contract. The Japanese now coming in are a tricky and cunning lot, who break contracts and become quite independent. They are not organized into unions, but their clannishness seems to operate as a union would. One trick is to contract work at a certain price and then, in the rush of the harvest, threaten to strike unless wages are raised.

³³California Bureau of Labor Statistics, Ninth Biennial Report, 1900 (p. 23).

³⁴Idem, Twelfth Biennial Report, Sacramento, 1905-6.

The Japanese employed strike strategy as early as 1891,³⁵ but severe unemployment and competition for jobs with other races during the nineties precluded collective bargaining. In the early 1900's, when other labor groups migrated to nonagricultural employments, the dominance of the Japanese in agriculture became more pronounced and their position was strengthened. A series of strikes and boycotts for wage increases was carried out, the effectiveness of which was noted by the Immigration Commission in its Report of 1911. Investigators reported that in several important areas of the State the Japanese " * * * by securing control of the situation * * * have reduced the workday from 12 hours to 11 hours, and by means of strikes have raised the wages of all races."³⁶

First of such strikes was among Japanese fruit dryers in Hayward (Alameda County), during August 1902, seeking a wage increase from 8 to 10 cents for cutting apricots. The strike was broken when they were replaced by white men.³⁷ Another instance in which Japanese strikers were supplanted by whites occurred in Santa Barbara County in 1906. As reported in the Pacific Rural Press for October 10, 1906, Japanese walnut pickers employed by the H. R. Owen ranch in Santa Barbara County struck for an increase in wages. Owen had previously contracted with them to pick walnuts from the ground at \$13 per ton, and they now asked \$15. The request was met with a flat refusal on Owen's part, but he made an alternative offer of \$1.75 per day. When they refused this, he replaced them with white men.

A strike of Japanese farm workers in Sutter County, in August 1903, was more successful. This walk-out was perhaps typical of many. The growers found themselves unable to recruit an alternative labor supply at the height of the harvest season and were forced to give in to the collective demand for a wage increase to \$1.40 per day in place of the prevailing \$1.25.³⁸

Japanese gained a dominating position in the vineyards of Fresno and exerted organized pressure for wage increases.³⁹ On occasion they utilized some rather unique varieties of "job action" and "slow-down" strikes later made famous by the I.W.W. Fuller describes some of these practices as follows:

* * * Once established by working very rapidly on a low time wage, their pace began soon to slow up. In order to get any quantity of work done, employers had to put them on piece rates, whereupon their activity was said to have undergone an astonishing transformation. They would now work much more rapidly and in addition their gang bosses would undertake contracts for more work than they could perform, in both ways giving little satisfaction by way of quality. After being put on piece rates, the next step frequently was for the Japanese to attempt to contract with the grower to attend the whole detail of harvesting his crop on a share basis. As a bargaining argument the Japanese were able to assure the producer that he would get none of their countrymen to work for him the following season if he did not meet their demands. (Fuller, op cit., p. 19834.)

The first important field workers' strike to cross racial lines took place in March 1903. It involved approximately a thousand Japanese and Mexican sugar-beet workers in Oxnard (Ventura County). This inci-

³⁵California Fruit Grower, Vol. VIII, June 13, 1891 (p. 378).

³⁶Reports of Senate Committee on Immigration, 1911, Vol. 24 (p. 229).

³⁷Oakland Tribune, August 4, 1902.

³⁸The Pacific Rural Press of August 15, 1903 (p. 103), in commenting on this incident, observed that "the Japs are becoming in a measure schooled in the ways of Americans and on last Tuesday went on strike. They asked for a raise of 15 cents a day. They were being paid \$1.25 per day and demanded \$1.40. The fruit was ripening rapidly, and the little brown men had their employers in a corner, which they were not slow in realizing, and took the opportunity of making a raise. Their demands were promptly met by the growers, and everything was soon working smoothly in these orchards."

³⁹California Fruit Grower, Vol. XXVIII, April 18, 1903 (p. 4).

dent caused reverberations throughout organized-labor circles in southern California, as it brought to the fore the question of including nonwhite casual agricultural laborers in the hitherto exclusively white trade-unions. The extremely low wages paid in the highly industrialized sugar-beet farms were felt to be demoralizing to the local white labor market. This strike was one of the first attempts to raise wages by eliminating the labor contractors who acted as middlemen. They were making money from their workers from the sale of provisions as well as from the commissions for jobs. Despite some violent opposition, the workers were successful in gaining the right to bargain directly with the employers.⁴⁰

The position of the contractor on issues arising in agricultural strikes was not the same in all circumstances. He tended to be a "marginal man" in relation to the grower on one side and the labor force on the other. Sometimes he was primarily the employers' agent who received a certain amount for guaranteeing the completion of a job and was interested mainly in obtaining his labor force as cheaply as possible so as to increase his profit margin. Hence arose the Oxnard strike of 1903 and others like it, designed to eliminate such middlemen. On several occasions contractors failed to pay their workers, or even absconded with money provided by the employer to cover all labor costs. Stricter licensing regulations under State law eliminated this evil almost entirely in later years.

In other situations the contractor was more closely associated with his workers, acting as their negotiator in bargaining for the highest possible price in the performance of a given job. Among the Japanese, contractors and the gangs they hired often had agreements covering wages and exclusive job areas. Sometimes these approximated closed shops. A special agent of the Immigration Commission reported in 1911 that at the time of his investigation in the Fresno area, "the smaller gangs who pick small vineyards have the territory distributed among them, and one gang will not take a 'job' in a district belonging to another."⁴¹

In one instance a strike was conducted by one group of Japanese in Fresno County to prevent the employment of others of their countrymen from adjoining Kings County. Pickets were established on roads leading into the "exclusive territory," and were successful in preventing the "outsiders" from coming in to work.⁴¹

Strong antagonism to the Japanese developed among the rural white population in many areas of California, partly as a result of their collective-bargaining tactics. More important, however, in stimulating strong racial antipathies, particularly among smaller growers, was the tendency for Japanese to abandon wage labor and operate farms as small tenants and owners. Before the immigration of Japanese was restricted, this occupational rise did not decrease the labor supply seriously. After the "Gentlemen's Agreement" with Japan in 1905, however, the number available as wage workers was reduced markedly. The Alien Land Act of 1914 and its successors of later years, designed to set limits on land ownership or control by Orientals, did not serve to drive the Japanese back to farm labor. It had the effect, rather, of increasing their number in city trades and occupations. They were replaced by new nonwhite immigrant groups in many farm occupations.

⁴⁰Oakland Tribune, April 1, 1903 (p. 1).

⁴¹Reports of Senate Committee on Immigration, 1911, Vol. 24 (p. 591).

The A.F. of L. and the Casual White Worker

Sporadic efforts were made during the early 1900's to organize casual and seasonal white laborers in agriculture and allied industries. The unions of whites that were formed, however, do not appear to have been so effective for collective bargaining as the Japanese associations. White workers employed on California ranches were more disorganized and individualistic, and for the most part were single migratory males of the type commonly termed "hobos" or "bundle-stiffs." Growers apparently preferred Oriental labor for harvesting operations. Whites were more difficult to recruit and to hold to the job; complaints were legion regarding their intractability, their continual dissatisfaction with wages and working conditions, and their undependability.⁴²

An extraordinarily high rate of labor turn-over was indicated in one survey made at the time, showing that the average duration of jobs for individual workers in harvesting and orchard work was only 7 to 10 days.⁴³ However, as was pointed out at the time, the rapid shifting by white laborers indicated a certain physical and psychological inability to work efficiently under the substandard conditions accepted by Orientals. A high rate of labor turn-over, commonly interpreted by employers and laymen as "labor undependability," was said actually to be an "instinctive" or unconscious exercise of the "strike in detail"—simply drifting off the job—as a protest against unsatisfactory working conditions.^{43*}

White workers tended to concentrate in the processing stages of agriculture. In industries such as canning and packing of fruits and vegetables the work was more skilled, regular, and better paid than in harvesting. It was in these industries that white workers first began to organize unions for collective bargaining, in a period when farm production was expanding rapidly and the demand for labor was rising. As early as 1895, it was reported that a group of 150 girls working in raisin-packing sheds in Fresno threatened to strike, but this did not materialize. They had been brought in from San Francisco because the plants were short-handed, and they attempted to take advantage of a labor scarcity to demand pay increases.⁴⁴

A strike of draymen in the summer of 1901 attracted considerable attention from the public and hostile opposition from the growers. The Pacific Rural Press termed it "abominable and exasperating," as it prevented the transportation of farm goods to and from canneries and wharves.⁴⁵ It created such "hateful conditions," according to a later issue of the same journal, that farmers began to consider the possibilities of "a general law prescribing a closed season for strikers during the gathering and movement of staple crops."⁴⁶

In following years a series of strikes took place in various operations associated with agriculture. The Twelfth Biennial Report of the California Bureau of Labor Statistics mentioned several during the years 1901-5, in addition to those carried out by Japanese field workers. A strike of hop pickers in Sacramento in August 1901, seemed to have been organized on a quasi-racketeering basis for sharing the gains between the leaders

⁴²Testimony of Horst, Vol. 5 of Report of Commission on Industrial Relations, 1915-16.

⁴³Carlton Parker op. cit. (p. 76).

⁴⁴Pacific Rural Press, October 5, 1895 (p. 2).

⁴⁵Idem, July 27, 1901 (p. 50).

⁴⁶Idem, August 24, 1901.

and the strikers.⁴⁷ More numerous were the spontaneous strikes and those organized by local unions—of the raisin pickers in Fresno in 1901 and again in 1902 (the latter after the organization of a local union), of the prune pickers in the Fresno area and the sugar workers in San Francisco in 1902, and of the orange packers in the Redlands area in 1904.⁴⁸ Save for its conclusion, the prune pickers' strike in Fresno in 1902 was perhaps typical of the many small and primitive spontaneous strikes taking place in a period of acute labor shortage. As reported in the *Pacific Rural Press* of September 27, 1902, "a bunch of young fellows from town," who had been employed for \$1.50 per day, went on strike at the East Side Fruit Growers Union prune orchards near Fresno. They demanded \$1.75 per day and were granted the increase because of the acute shortage of help. A few days later, when there was a "tremendous rush of prunes," the workers took advantage of the emergency to strike again for a further increase to \$2 per day. This time, however, the daughters of the growers came to the rescue and worked all the following day for \$1.75, thus preventing the fruit from going to waste.

The Fruit and Raisin Packing House Employees Union was organized in Fresno and affiliated with the A.F. of L.⁴⁹ in 1901, following a successful strike of 350 workers against a wage reduction. This organization concentrated on unionizing the more skilled processing workers in the packing sheds and ignored the unskilled migratory field labor.

The hitherto anti-Oriental and exclusively white local organizations affiliated to the American Federation of Labor became interested in unionizing seasonal workers in agricultural industries during the following year. The national convention of the American Federation of Labor, held in New Orleans in 1902, and the convention of the California State Federation of Labor, held in Los Angeles in 1903, both voted to place an organizer among the agricultural workers of California.⁵⁰ One major incident which prompted this change of attitude was the strike of about 1,000 Mexican and Japanese workers in the sugar-beet fields in the vicinity of Oxnard (Ventura County) in protest against what the *Oakland Tribune* called "starvation and bad treatment."⁵⁰ The Los Angeles Labor Council passed a resolution which was forwarded to the national executive of the A.F. of L., stating in part—

* * * We do declare our belief that the most effective method of protecting the American workingman and his standard of living is by universal organization of wage workers regardless of race or nationality.⁵⁰

The comment of one official of the California Federation of Labor was highly optimistic:

* * * This is one of the most important resolutions ever brought to the attention of the executive council * * *. It virtually breaks the ice on the question of forming the Orientals into unions and so keeping them from scabbing on white people, in place of not recognizing Asiatics as at present.⁵⁰

⁴⁷According to Constable Frank Millard, as quoted in the *Sacramento Record Union* of September 1, 1901, the promoter of the strike was a man named Schreiber, who wanted the pickers to strike for \$1 per hundredweight in place of the prevailing 80 cents, on the understanding that he was to receive half of the increase for engineering it. He was unable to organize the 200 white workers, however. Only a few went on strike, and Schreiber and his 16 "lieutenants" reportedly "ran out" on them.

⁴⁸California Bureau of Labor Statistics, Twelfth Biennial Report, 1904-5 (p. 200).

⁴⁹American Federationist, Vol. 8, No. 11, November 1901 (p. 485).

⁵⁰Oakland Tribune, April 21, 1903.

The little evidence available does not indicate, however, that the resolution was favorably acted upon by the executive council of the A.F. of L.

During the same year a Fruit Workers' Union was formed at San Jose. Several local branches were established throughout Santa Clara County and other counties, and these elected delegates to the Federated Trades Council. The Pacific Rural Press described the movement as follows:

During the last two years the organizing committee of the Federated Trades [Council] has had pleading requests from the fruit workers, time and time again, to organize them. Just as the fruit workers of this county have been organized during the last few months, so local unions are forming simultaneously in all parts of the State, all of which is not an accidental coincidence but a response to a general need. (Pacific Rural Press, March 28, 1903, p. 204.)

The program of the new organization, chartered as Fruit Workers Union No. 10770, was quite modest. J. Ryan of San Jose, county president of the organization, denied any intention of making exorbitant requests:

No demands of any kind, shape, or form have yet been prepared by this union, nor is there in existence the demands or resolutions of any other union that require \$2 for an 8-hour day in fruit work. * * * I am at liberty to state that not a member has ever ventured such a radical suggestion as an 8-hour day for every worker in the fruit industry.⁵¹

The union continued to function for several years; it failed to develop into an effective collective-bargaining organization, however, and in time died out. The only organized action reported among white farm workers for several years was a small walk-out in Fresno in 1906. Some 200 vine pickers went on strike for higher wages, manifesting what the Pacific Rural Press called "a local phase of organized farm labor." The strike was called to enforce a demand for a wage increase from the prevailing \$1.25 per day to \$1.50, with board, or from \$1.75 to \$2, without board. The strikers pointed out that the cost of living had increased considerably, so that houses which formerly rented for \$5 per month now cost \$9, and firewood had risen from \$6 to \$8 to \$9 per cord.⁵²

About this time the casual labor problem again came to the attention of the American Federation of Labor affiliates. In July 1908, at the suggestion of Andrew Furuseth, well-known president of the International Seamen's Union, the organizing committee of the Oakland Central Labor Council was instructed to consider ways and means for organizing migratory unskilled workers. A resolution was passed, stressing the exploitation of these laborers and the menace which this constituted to the security and high standards of organized urban trades.⁵³ This view was repeated many times during the following year in further resolutions passed by the State federation and city central bodies of the A.F. of L. in California.

Finally, in 1910, during the national convention of the A.F. of L. in St. Louis, the executive council was instructed to take steps necessary to bring casual and migratory workers into the province of unionism.⁵⁴

⁵¹Pacific Rural Press, May 16, 1903 (p. 306). Earlier a local of the union had been organized at Gilroy and demanded \$1.50 per day with board, at hours from 7 a.m. to 12 noon, and from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. Overtime was to be compensated at the rate of 20 cents per hour. (*Idem*, Apr. 13, 1903, p. 37.)

⁵²Pacific Rural Press, December 22, 1906 (p. 386).

⁵³Lewis Lorwin: *The American Federation of Labor*, Washington, 1933 (p. 110).

⁵⁴History-Encyclopedia and Reference Book, A.F. of L., Washington, D.C., 1927, Vol. II (p. 237).

Subsequently, an organizer was put on the pay rolls of the State Federation of Labor and maintained from 1911 to 1916. Little was accomplished. Federal labor unions were formed in cities where migratory workers, agricultural and otherwise, tended to concentrate in off-seasons. J. B. Dale, A.F. of L. organizer, stated in 1915 that these bodies, known collectively as the United Laborers of America, were established in San Francisco, Oakland, Richmond, Fresno, Bakersfield, Sacramento, San Jose, and San Rafael. Each local was affiliated with the central labor council of its city and chartered directly by the A.F. of L. The total membership in the State was estimated to be 5,000, with 2,000 of these in San Francisco. Dale admitted that few of these were truly agricultural labor unions. None of the workers were organized on their ranch jobs, nor did they bargain collectively with their grower-employers through the agency of a union.⁵⁵

The A.F. of L.'s organizing drive, despite the sentiment expressed in the resolution by the Los Angeles Central Labor Council in earlier years, was designed to favor white workers at the expense of Orientals. In 1911, two A.F. of L. organizers in Fresno attempted to recruit white workers for the announced purpose of displacing Japanese employed in harvesting grapes.⁵⁶ The experiment proved unsuccessful.

Though the A.F. of L. apparently was careful to maintain a mild and conciliatory attitude, farm-labor unionism was not welcomed by the growers. One C. W. Thomas, more self-critical than most, called the attention of his associates to the fact that "the conditions which are forced on white migratory workers have a tendency to degenerate the men," and warned that unionization would inevitably follow if conditions were not improved. "Labor agitation is already in the hands of men inimical to the farmer * * * some effort should be made to protect unorganized farm labor against organized skilled labor."⁵⁷

The organizing drive of the A.F. of L. came to little, and was finally abandoned during the war years. The migratory and casual workers were difficult to hold for any length of time in an organization that appealed primarily to a minority of skilled workers. Casual farm laborers, whose work was seasonal and poorly paid, could not afford to pay regular union dues even when set by the A.F. of L. at an especially low level; and the dues which could be collected from the workers were not sufficient to maintain the staff of organizers needed to keep a union functioning effectively.

⁵⁵Report of Commission on Industrial Relations, 1915, Vol. IV (pp. 4972, 4976).

⁵⁶P. Sioris and T. C. Seaward, the organizers, were furnished Greek laborers to take the place of Japanese in harvesting grapes in the Fresno area. Their avowed intention was to eliminate contractors and employment agencies by substituting the union as middleman. Sioris went further, expressing the opinion that white laborers should be given a preference in employment since they "eat American food and spend their money here." (Fresno Morning Republican, Sept. 9, 1911, p. 9.) Apparently, however, the Greeks, imported from San Francisco and Sacramento, were found unsatisfactory. The management of the Tarpey Vineyard, for instance, claimed that Japanese could pick 60 to 65 boxes of grapes per day, whereas the Greeks could only pick 40. (Idem, Sept. 11, 1911.)

⁵⁷Quoted from McWilliams, op. cit. (p. 101).

CHAPTER VI.—The I.W.W. in California

“Educating” the Casual Worker

The revolutionary Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), whose philosophy was sharply at variance with orthodox unionism, was more effective than the American Federation of Labor in organizing the single, transient, white laborers. In the prewar era, the major efforts of the I.W.W. in the larger cities of the Pacific Coast were expended on agitation and propaganda designed to imbue casual laborers with “class consciousness.” Several years’ “education” of casual and migratory seasonal laborers was considered necessary before effective unionism and direct action could be undertaken.

Unlike the Orientals, white workers were not homogeneous and did not at that time specialize in agricultural labor. They accepted seasonal jobs in the fields only when other, better-paying industrial jobs were unavailable. According to George B. Speed, I.W.W. organizer, testifying before the U. S. Commission on Industrial Relations—

* * * the average migratory worker has had no sense of organization whatever. The Japs and Chinese have a far better sense of organization than has the native American, and the result is when he eliminates the native out of a given locality he gets better conditions and wages than the native worker does. The native worker through the agitation that has been going on in the State during the last several years is commencing to wake up and realize the necessity of some form of organization in order to keep in touch and develop. He is commencing to realize that now.¹

When asked about the result of some 6 to 8 years’ effort at organizing the migrants, Mr. Speed replied: “Nothing more than the sentiment and feeling that is manifest among that class of labor when we go among them.”² From the organization’s point of view this result was all-important. In the revolutionary I.W.W. philosophy, the major and final purpose of organizing and carrying out strikes was not to achieve immediate gains in wages or improvements in working conditions, but rather, to promote class consciousness and a sentiment of solidarity among the workers, as a step to final revolution.

“Harvest stiff” during nonharvest seasons worked in lumber camps, railroad construction, or intermittent urban employments. They usually tried to save a small “stake” during the harvest and threshing season and go to the larger cities when the work ended. There, like the Orientals, they could “hibernate,” rooming in cheap lodging houses and eating in cheap restaurants during the winter months. After completion of the grain harvest in the Middle West, some would go to Canada, and from there to the Pacific Coast. Others went straight west from the Dakotas to Seattle or Portland, and from there to California, where the climate was warm and living relatively cheap.

In California the I.W.W., like the A.F. of L., limited its organizing campaign in the beginning to the cities and towns where seasonal workers “holed up.” These places constituted the main concentration points or

¹Hearings, Industrial Commission, Vol. 5 (1915), p. 4943.

²Idem (p. 4945).

labor markets for casual day labor. Temporary workers were recruited in large numbers for farm jobs in surrounding areas from such cities and towns as San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento, Stockton, Fresno, Los Angeles, Bakersfield, and Brawley. The I.W.W. at one time claimed as many as 10,000 to 12,000 members scattered through these areas. The membership fluctuated widely, however, because of the seasonal nature of farm work and the mobility of the laborers.²

Prewar Years

The "Free Speech Fights"

The first important struggles of the I.W.W. in California were not strikes or "labor troubles on the job." They were, rather, the fights for free speech and the right to carry on agitation and organization in the cities where casual laborers concentrated. Here the I.W.W. met strong and violent opposition from the more conservative elements.

The free-speech fight most important to the I.W.W. occurred in Fresno which, situated in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley, had long been a nerve center or key concentration-point for agricultural labor in the State. The main issues of the fight involved the right of the I.W.W. to maintain a headquarters, to distribute literature, and to hold public meetings. During the 6-month struggle, strong measures of suppression were employed by the public authorities. The conflict finally won a certain degree of tolerance for the activities of the I.W.W. and gained for that organization a status and importance among agricultural laborers far beyond its numerical significance.³

The struggle in San Diego, beginning early in 1912, was more sensational and violent. There the efforts of authorities to suppress "wobbly" meetings culminated in an ordinance which outlawed free speech throughout the city. The I.W.W. endeavored to combat this move by bringing outside members into the city to pack the jails. This attempt was countered by the formation of a vigilance committee the members of which assisted the authorities in posting armed guards on highways to turn back incoming transients and to round up all persons suspected of being connected with the I.W.W. Considerable violence was employed by the authorities and vigilantes, and several "wobblies" were seriously injured. The hostility of the community was perhaps most clearly expressed in the San Diego Tribune in its issue of March 4, 1912:

Hanging is none too good for them and they would be much better dead, for they are absolutely useless in the human economy. They are the waste material of creation and should be drained off into the sewer of oblivion, there to rot in cold obstruction like any other excrement.⁴

The Wheatland Riot and Other Strikes

Following the free-speech fights, the I.W.W. turned its attention more directly to economic action. Its prestige was now considerably enhanced, and its locals expanded rapidly in key labor centers such as San

²Hearings, Industrial Commission, Vol. 5 (1915), p. 4945.

³Paul Brissenden: *The I.W.W.—A Study of American Syndicalism* (New York, Columbia University Studies in History and Economics, 1919, Vol. 83, p. 262).

⁴Idem (p. 264).

Francisco, Oakland, Fresno, and Bakersfield. Delegates were sent from these cities into the fields to organize workers on the job and to carry out "job action strikes."

What influence the union had in rural areas was attributable in large part to the fact that the main body of white migratory workers on farms was composed of unmarried "bindle-stiffs" or "boomers," recruited from other industries. Many of them had worked in lumber camps, coal mines, and railroad construction gangs, where they had been already exposed to the agitation of "wobbly" delegates. Many in turn became "job delegates" or organizers among agricultural workers.

I.W.W. tactics in agriculture followed much the same informal pattern that had been applied in other seasonal industries. Most of the organizing was done not by "outside" paid organizers but by "job delegates" who were actually employed on the job.⁵ They would form a nucleus of the more militant or disaffected workers, organize and call a strike, and then use persuasion or intimidation to get the rest of the workers to join. Since most of the workers were single men, the restraint imposed by family obligations was usually absent, and the strikes were often violent and uncontrolled. Organizers imbued with revolutionary zeal were not inclined to seek settlement of a strike on an amicable basis. They were more concerned with widening each strike to large proportions so as to widen the scope of class conflict.

From 1913 onward intermittently through the war years, several spontaneous field workers' strikes and labor troubles were reported to have been led by I.W.W. "job delegates," or at least to have involved representatives of that organization. During August 1913, newspapers reported three such strikes. At the H. Lee Co. orchard in Vina (Tehama County), a small strike of peach pickers belonging to the I.W.W. resulted in a 20-percent increase in wages.⁶ In the vicinity of Perkins (Sacramento County), 125 pickers led by 6 I.W.W. members went on strike, but the results were not reported. The ranch foreman was said to have threatened that, if the strikers did not return to work, there would never be another white man or woman employed on the place.⁷

Far overshadowing these strikes was the much publicized "Wheatland riot," which, more than any other event at the time, brought to public attention the problems facing white migratory laborers. This incident was described by one observer as "a purely spontaneous uprising * * * a psychological protest against factory conditions of hop picking * * * and the emotional result of the nervous impact of the exceedingly irritating and intolerable conditions under which those people worked at the time."⁸

Following a practice not unusual among large-scale growers, E. B. Durst, hop rancher, had advertised in newspapers throughout California and Nevada for some 2,700 workers. He subsequently admitted that he could provide employment for only about 1,500, and that living arrangements were inadequate even for that number. Workers of many racial stocks from many areas poured into the community by every conceivable means of transportation, and some walked from nearby towns. A great number had no bedding and slept on piles of straw thrown on floors, in

⁵Characteristically, a "wobbly" would hear of a situation where conditions were creating dissatisfaction, would travel to the area, get a job if possible, and begin to organize a strike. During the course of the strike, meetings were usually devoted to an exposition of the revolutionary philosophy as understood by the organizers, rather than to means of settling the issues.

⁶Sacramento Bee, August 7, 1913.

⁷Idem, August 20, 1913.

⁸Hearings, Industrial Commission, Vol. 5 (1915), p. 5000.

tents rented from Durst at 75 cents a week; many slept in the fields. There were no facilities for sanitation or garbage disposal and only 9 outdoor toilets for 2,800 people; dysentery became prevalent to an alarming degree. The water wells were insufficient for the camp, and no means existed for bringing water to the fields. Durst's cousin had a lemonade concession in the fields, selling the drink for 5 cents a glass. Local Wheatland stores were forbidden to send delivery wagons to the camp, so that workers were forced to buy what supplies they could afford from a concession store on the ranch.

These conditions were aggravated by the wage system at the ranch. The "going rate" for hop picking in California during 1913 was roughly \$1 per hundredweight. Durst paid 90 cents, with a bonus of 10 cents if the picker stayed through the harvest. He was able to pay this discriminatively low rate because of the surplus labor he had recruited. It was later charged that he purposely permitted the exceedingly uncomfortable and insanitary working conditions to exist so that some of the pickers would leave before the season was over and would thereby forfeit the 10-cent bonus. The earnings of the pickers were further reduced by the requirement of extra "clean" picking, and by the absence of sufficient "high-pole men" to pull down the vines within reach of the pickers.⁹

The conditions were sufficiently bad to bring the 2,800 people, representing at least 27 different nationalities, together in a spontaneous demonstration. It was estimated that only about 100 of the men had previously been connected with the I.W.W. However, the most active "agitator" among the hop pickers, one Blackie Ford, was an active I.W.W. delegate who had organized a "camp local" of some 30 members.

A mass meeting was addressed by Ford, followed by other speakers in various languages. Durst, who attended the meeting, asked for a committee to meet with him to settle the grievances. He promised suitable toilet accommodations and water on the fields. These were not supplied, however, and meanwhile resentment against the wage system grew. The camp was picketed, and a second meeting was held by the pickers in a public place which they hired for their own use. The meeting, which the county sheriff later testified was entirely peaceable, was invaded by a band of armed deputies who came to arrest Ford. One of the deputies on the fringe of the crowd fired a shot to "quiet the mob." This precipitated a riot, in the course of which the district attorney, a deputy sheriff, and two workers were killed and many more were injured.

Hysteria apparently gripped the authorities after the outbreak. Mass arrests of "wobblies" or sympathizers were carried out. Many of the arrested men were severely beaten or tortured, and many other were held incommunicado for weeks. Ford and Suhr, the two leading I.W.W. organizers in the camp, were convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment.¹⁰

Voluntary cooperation offered by Japanese to the organizers in Wheatland was an interesting side light on the strike. They pointed out to the whites that if they as Japanese were to cooperate openly, the whites would lose what support they had from the A.F. of L. because of the anti-Oriental sentiment of that organization. The Japanese therefore moved out of the area in a body, and for several months thereafter published an advertisement in Japanese-language papers calling upon their fellow

⁹Carey McWilliams; *Factories in the Fields* (pp. 158-159). Carlton Parker: *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays* (pp. 171-199).

¹⁰Hearings, Industrial Commission, Vol. 5 (1915), p. 5000.

countrymen to abstain from working in the hop industry until the grievances of the pickers were ended and until the arrested strike leaders were released.¹⁰

The prevalence of labor agitation and conflict during these immediate prewar years was attributed by Carlton Parker, in a report to the California Commission on Immigration and Housing, largely to bad living conditions and insecure and intermittent employment caused by the high seasonality of California's agriculture.¹¹ Fuller, however, pointed out¹² that these were substantially the same living and employment conditions that had faced California's casual labor for decades. In his opinion the unrest was to be explained rather by the fact that severe depression and industrial unemployment had driven into casual farm labor a class of people who were unaccustomed to the conditions which it imposed. The situation was aggravated further by migration of unemployed persons from other States, following the slogan "You cannot freeze to death in California." The economic environment was like that existing during the middle nineties, when anti-Oriental riots and boycotts in rural areas reached their height, and like that which was to exist again during the 1930's when radical labor organizations led farm strikes of unprecedented proportions.

The Wheatland affair was one of the most significant incidents in the long history of labor troubles in California. It created an opportunity for effective investigation by the Commission on Immigration and Housing in California which (under the chairmanship of Simon J. Lubin) did much to improve living and housing conditions for migratory workers. Those beginnings toward social control of the problem were to a large degree nullified, however, by the temporary prosperity during the World War.

The I.W.W. During World War I

The growth of labor unionism in California agriculture was checked during World War I. A chronic shortage of workers led the growers to seek new sources of labor of a type that could not be organized easily. State agencies assisted in recruiting youths in large numbers from institutions and schools. Schools were closed early in order to release children for temporary farm work. A campaign to recruit women was carried out through the Woman's Land Army of America, California Division. This organization involved some degree of collective bargaining, since growers were required to sign contracts agreeing to employ a definite number of women for a fixed period of employment. In addition to recruiting local labor supplies, growers in the Imperial Valley imported several hundred families from Texas and Oklahoma. Finally, toward the close of the war, a large supply of cheap labor was made available through relaxing the immigration laws and importing Mexicans by thousands.¹³

¹⁰Hearings, Industrial Commission, Vol. 5 (1915), p. 5000.

¹¹The Casual Laborer and Other Essays (pp. 171-199).

¹²Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 54 (p. 19844).

¹³The U. S. Department of Labor in May 1917 issued an order suspending the head tax, literacy test, and provisions against contract labor. It expressly authorized farm operators to bring Mexicans into the United States, where they were to engage exclusively in agricultural labor on pain of facing arrest and deportation. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 54, p. 19848.)

The war years were marked by intermittent organizational efforts on the part of the I.W.W. In a period of labor shortage and rising prices this organization was partially successful in raising wages. Following the Wheatland affair, the union had become much more active in agriculture throughout the United States, and particularly in the Wheat Belt of the Middle West. In 1915, local I.W.W. unions of agricultural workers were federated into a new nation-wide department, the Agricultural Workers Organization, chartered as "The 400."

The effectiveness of the I.W.W. organization in California was, however, to a large degree dissipated in jurisdictional disputes and internal wrangles. Owing to sectionalism of the membership and poor communications with the national headquarters in the Middle West, The 400 failed to become established in the State. A proposal by the Agricultural Workers Organization executive to open a branch office in California which would absorb existing agricultural workers' local unions was rejected by the membership in this State. Instead, the existing locals called a special conference and applied for a separate charter. It was granted in February 1916, as the Agricultural Workers Organization No. 440, known as the A.W.O. of California. This union lasted only a few months and died from "localism and sectarianism."¹⁴ Local branches of the A.W.O. remained active for some time afterward, however.

The year 1917 marked the last but most active appearance of the I.W.W. in the fields of California. The Pacific Rural Press of November 2, 1917, pictured the disturbances in dramatic terms:

Early in the year, the propaganda of the I.W.W. organized and incited an uprising in Fresno County, which proceeded to the fields in all the surrounding country and compelled the men working there to leave their work by threats of bodily injury and by the showing of arms and deadly weapons.

The strike began in a few Fresno vineyards with a walk-out of 50 German and Italian laborers demanding higher wages and shorter hours. According to the Fresno Morning Republican of February 8, 1917, the strikers "terrorized" a number of Japanese into joining them. Within 2 days the movement involved several hundred workers organized in various language branches of the I.W.W. Shortly afterwards D. P. Pagano, president of the Italian branch of the A.W.O., announced that about 200 strikers would resume work on a large vineyard which had accepted the new scale set by the union—\$2.50 for an 8-hour day.¹⁵ The following day, at a special meeting in Fresno, vineyardists acceded to the demands of the remaining strikers, estimated at the time at 2,000.¹⁶

The Japanese Association of Fresno, as spokesman for Japanese pruners who had joined the strike, announced that they would return to work at a rate of \$2.50 for a 9-hour day. In response to criticism from other members of the A.W.O. still out on strike, the Japanese pointed out that their scale was the equivalent of that set by the union, because the Japanese for the most part camped on the work sites and worked an extra hour for the free rent they were allowed. The Japanese did not join the union nor did their association endorse the strike; they had not been consulted beforehand, but had been ignored until after the strike was called.¹⁷

¹⁴E. Workman: History of "The 400," One Big Union Club, Chicago, Ill., 1935 (p. 17).

¹⁵Fresno Morning Republican, February 10, 1917.

¹⁶Idem, February 12, 1917.

¹⁷Idem, February 12, 1917 (p. 3).

Several packing houses in the vicinity of Riverside were closed in April 1917 by a strike of orange-picking gangs attempting to enforce higher wage scales. Not a gang was picking in the district for several days, it was reported. Packing companies in Redlands soon broke the strike by obtaining injunctions which restrained strikers from interfering with pickers recruited to take their places.¹⁸

In June 1917, farm laborers went on strike in the vicinity of Turlock. A thousand carloads of cantaloupes were reported lost as a result. The strike ended when growers enlisted local townspeople to drive "agitators" from the community.¹⁹

Effective organizing and strike action by the I.W.W. ended early in September 1917, when the nation-wide campaign to suppress the union was launched. Over 500 persons were arrested and 160 were later convicted of criminal syndicalism in Wichita, Chicago, and Sacramento, where the Federal prosecutions were held.

The most vigorous action against the I.W.W. in California was taken at first in the vicinity of Fresno, where its successful strike had been carried out earlier in the year. The organization was accused of sabotage in Fresno, and many members were arrested on this charge. On September 2, 1917, the Fresno Morning Republican carried a story describing the sabotage inflicted by the I.W.W. on local growers; haystacks had been burned and many trays of raisins were dumped on the ground and covered with dirt. As a result of these and other incidents reported at the time, a great round-up of the members was launched. On September 6, 1917, the I.W.W. hall in Fresno was raided, over a hundred men were seized, and some 19 were arrested. Later, raids and arrests were made by Federal officers in Stockton, Hanford, and elsewhere in the State. The general round-up continued throughout the fall of 1917.²⁰ The U.S. Department of Justice opened an office in Fresno, with William Freeman, special investigator, in charge. Farmers having labor trouble were directed to report to that office.²¹

Toilers of the World

During the late war years the I.W.W. carried on a disguised participation in a new organization named "Toilers of the World." This short-lived local union developed in the canning industry of San Jose (Santa Clara County). It was unique in the annals of California labor history in respect to the ambitious program to which it was committed, and in its ability, despite violent opposition, to rally and hold together a body of hitherto unorganized workers. The Toilers of the World was a hybrid group, including in its ranks a number of dissident and active elements from both the A.F. of L. and the I.W.W. Some of the former were said to have joined the Toilers after severing their connections with the A.F. of L. because it was "too conservative and unreliable."²² The influence of the I.W.W. was more apparent in the organization, both

¹⁸California Cultivator, April 7, 1917 (p. 410).

¹⁹Carey McWilliams, op. cit. (p. 172).

²⁰Idem (p. 170).

²¹Los Angeles Times, September 11, 1917.

²²San Francisco Examiner, March 14, 1918.

in its name and in its objectives. A number of "wobblies" joined, apparently, to carry out a sort of "boring-from-within" policy, hiding their affiliations with the I.W.W. because of its "unpatriotic" stigma during the late war years.

The union began in March 1917 as a more or less spontaneous movement. A mass meeting of fruit workers was addressed by a clergyman "representing the church labor movement," by some "famous Japanese labor organizers," and by other speakers who addressed the audience in English and Italian.²³ Out of this meeting the Toilers of the World was organized, and was later chartered as a federal labor union of the A.F. of L. It was designed to "organize men and women fruit workers into one great union through which they would gain fair wages and hours of labor,"²⁴ and was declared "open to all workers over 16, regardless of race or creed."²⁵ The organizer, E. B. Mercadier, was a printer by trade who had been in the coal and hay business in San Jose for several years. He was described as a "moderate * * * student of labor problems."²⁵

The union included a variety of racial elements and claimed the support of substantial liberal groups. In a meeting attended by about 1,000 people on May 6, 1917, at which Mercadier presided, the audience was composed mostly of Americans, Italians, and Japanese. The elected president was an Italian named San Filippo. According to the San Jose Mercury Herald of May 7, 1917, the Reverend W. L. Stidger, pastor of the First Methodist Church, promised the support of his church to the union, and Father William Culligan of St. Joseph Church commended the organization. By this time, the union had become the largest labor organization in Santa Clara County, with 10 delegates in the Central Labor Council.

The union's main objective was to achieve a wage increase of 25 percent and, ultimately, the unionization of the whole fruit, vegetable, and berry industry in Santa Clara County. It aimed to include Chinese wage earners, a number of whom had asked to be organized.²⁶ Later in the year the Toilers of the World conducted a large cannery strike, as a result of which it won agreements, covering wages, hours, and union recognition, from the larger canneries of San Jose. This was the first instance in the cannery industry of California in which the techniques of mass demonstration and mass picketing were employed to enforce the demands of strikers and to bring their working conditions to public attention. The picket lines of the union were apparently well maintained in spite of considerable violence from local authorities, as well as intimidation from a National Guard unit dispatched to the strike area.

The Toilers' position was weakened considerably, as America's participation in World War I generated strong anti-union sentiments in many quarters. Agreements reached by the union after the strike of 1917 were maintained throughout 1918. In the spring of 1919, however, the union was broken. During a period of rising prices and temporary labor shortage it attempted by strike action to win wage increases to a standard of \$3.50 for a 6-hour day, time and a half for overtime, and double pay for Sundays and holidays.²⁷ The strike was defeated and the union declined rapidly thereafter.

²³Mercury Herald (San Jose), March 31, 1917.

²⁴San Francisco Examiner, March 14, 1918.

²⁵Mercury Herald (San Jose), May 4, 1917.

²⁶Idem, May 13, 1917 (p. 18).

²⁷San Francisco Examiner, April 21, 1919 (p. 5).

Postwar Labor Unrest

Labor unrest became widespread throughout the United States during the immediate postwar years, and California's agriculture and related industries were affected thereby. The I.W.W. continued to maintain an organization in the fields, while the A.F. of L. temporarily renewed its interest in seasonal agricultural and allied workers under the pressure of numerous spontaneous strikes. Eleven walk-outs occurred between August 1918 and August 1920, most of them in canneries and packing sheds. A few resulted in the organization of labor unions, some of which were later chartered by the A.F. of L.

A series of strikes occurred in northern California in the rural district near San Francisco and Oakland. It began with a walk-out, in August 1918, of some 350 women and 50 men in two canning plants of the California Packing Corp. in Oakland.²⁸ Other strikes during the next 2 years involved employees of a pickle works in Hayward, a plant of the California Packing Corp. in San Francisco, and a Libby, McNeill & Libby cannery in Sacramento.²⁹

The I.W.W. maintained a State branch of the Agricultural Workers Industrial Union No. 110 (successor to A.W.O., "The 400") in California for a few years after the war, and its "job delegates" were reported to be numerous. The *Industrial Worker*, organ of the I.W.W., by October 1920, was claiming that "we have several traveling delegates in this State [California] during the winter months; a successful campaign is now being launched which will put No. 110 on the map in this country."³⁰ These delegates apparently played a leading role in a strike of citrus workers in the vicinities of San Gabriel, Azusa, and Charter Oak in Los Angeles County. The Charter Oak Strike Committee was formed to organize and direct the strikers, whom the *California Cultivator* described as "American, Mexican, Japanese, and Russian 'Bolsheviks'."³¹

A.W.I.U. No. 110 claimed to have active locals in such towns as Marysville, Knights Landing, Willows, Porterville, Lindsay, and Exeter.³² Locals in the southern San Joaquin Valley attempted to organize and win a basic wage of \$6 for an 8-hour day in the fruit industry; they were frustrated, one spokesman reported, because "the valley-cats all gather there to jungle up by the river."³³

Behind this brief and temporarily revived agitation was the migration to California of unemployed city or industrial workers and of midwestern harvest hands who had been displaced by the mechanization of wheat farming. Indeed the I.W.W., through its organ the *Industrial Worker*, became an early "booster" for California. It urged migratory workers to go to that State for the off-season winter months, in order to awaken agricultural workers to their "class interests":

There is urgent need in California of workers who have been through the battles of the A.W.I.U. The "Old Reds," the militants with their knowledge of organizational methods, would do an immense amount of good work in the task

²⁸San Francisco Examiner, August 1 and 7, 1918.

²⁹Idem, April 12, 1919; October 3, 1919; August 8, 1920.

³⁰*Industrial Worker* (Everett, Wash.), October 30, 1920 (p. 2).

³¹*California Cultivator*, February 15, 1919 (p. 205).

³²*Industrial Worker*, September 25, 1920; October 23, 1920.

³³Idem, October 23, 1920.

of lining up the California agricultural workers solidly for the One Big Union. What say you, fellow workers? Shall we go West this winter and colonize the California agricultural industry? Shall we put a stalwart band of Middle Western harvest stiffs on the job in the Golden (?) West, and teach the bosses the same lesson that was so hard for them to learn in the wheat country? (*Industrial Worker*, December 11, 1920.)

Apparently little came of this appeal. No strikes or collective bargaining were reported as carried out officially by representatives of the I.W.W. in California after 1920. Approximately 500 hop pickers in a number of yards near Santa Rosa (Sonoma County), and 200 grape pickers in the vineyards near Lodi (San Joaquin County), struck during September 1921. These outbreaks, however, appear to have been spontaneous protests against wage cuts during a period of recession.³⁴

During the immediate postwar years union organizers became active in another distinct occupational group in industries allied to agriculture—fruit and vegetable packing-house workers. "Job delegates" of the I.W.W. were numerous among these workers, and they led several small strikes. These volunteer organizers laid the groundwork for an ambitious attempt by the A.F. of L. to organize an international union in this field.

In 1920 the A.F. of L. granted a federal labor union charter to a group employed in the packing of cauliflower, cabbage, and lettuce in Los Angeles, the principal shipping point for eastern markets. Verbal or unwritten agreements were established in certain plants, covering wage scales, hours, and working conditions for various categories of labor. Wage rates were set at \$5 per 8-hour day for packers and \$4 for trimmers, plus time and a fifth for overtime. Other crafts such as loaders, lidders, truckers, icers, and crate liners were paid in proportion. The union was broken during the winter of 1921-22 after losing a month-long strike for additional wage increases to a \$6 and \$5 scale.³⁵

The largest organization to be formed in the packing industry by the A.F. of L. during this period was the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union, which at one time claimed a membership of more than 5,000 in San Joaquin County alone.³⁶ Its initial impetus was provided by local independent organizations formed previously in Fresno and Imperial Counties. A series of strikes involving several hundred fruit and vegetable processing workers had occurred during late 1919 and 1920 in numerous packing plants in Fresno, as well as in five towns in San Joaquin County. The organization leading this movement had been reported originally as the Green Fruit Workers Union. It was later renamed the Fruit Workers Union of the San Joaquin Valley and, finally, the Central California Fruit Workers Union.³⁷ A branch of this union was also reported in August 1920 to have led a strike of more than 1,200 men and women employees in the canning industry of San Jose (Santa Clara County), where the Toilers of the World had previously been active.³⁸

From these beginnings the A.F. of L. attempted to organize the entire fruit and vegetable industry of California on a State-wide basis. In addition to the Central California Fruit Workers Union, it gained the affiliation of an independent packing-shed workers' union called the

³⁴San Francisco Examiner, September 14 and 21, 1921.

³⁵A. ("Shorty") Alston: *A Brief History of the Fruit and Vegetable Industry on the Pacific Coast* (unpublished document), San Francisco, 1938 (pp. 1, 2).

³⁶San Francisco Examiner, August 8 and 10, 1920.

³⁷Idem, July 3, 1919; August 2, 1919; and October 3, 1919.

³⁸Idem, August 8 and 10, 1920.

American Fruit Workers Association. This had been organized originally in Brawley (Imperial County), in 1918, and later had established branches in other localities. A minority of members who were adherents of the I.W.W. was reported as bitterly opposed to joining the A.F. of L.³⁹

The new union was chartered by the A.F. of L. as the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union, with headquarters in Fresno. Local charters were issued to other packing centers in California, Washington, and Oregon. Few gains apparently accrued to the members, and they dropped out in growing numbers. The F.V.W.U. finally disbanded in 1923, and for the next 5 years the A.F. of L. had no representation whatever in agricultural or allied industries.⁴⁰ The I.W.W. likewise remained largely inactive in these fields.

³⁹Alston, *op. cit.* (p. 3).

⁴⁰*Idem* (pp. 3-5).

CHAPTER VII.—California in the Twenties

Concentration in Farm Operations

The postwar decade became one of relative quiescence in rural California after the demise of A.F. of L. and I.W.W. organizations in agricultural industries. Employment relations were modified somewhat by rapid expansion in acreage of certain crops, and by the growth of new organizations among employers. The underlying structure of farm operations changed little, however, and the trend toward large-scale farming continued. California's agriculture furnished a striking comparison with the rest of the Nation as regards concentration in ownership and control.

Statistics confirm the view that the dominant type of enterprise producing fruit, vegetable, cotton, and specialty crops from the soil in California is the industrialized farm specializing in one or two commercial crops and operated by an agricultural employer who hires and fires gangs of laborers as needed.¹

By 1930 more than a third of all large-scale farms in the United States—those producing a gross annual output of \$30,000 or more—were in that State, and the average value of its farms was more than three times the national average. Although the large-scale farms numbered less than 3,000, or barely 2.1 percent of all farms in California, they produced 28.5 percent, by value, of all California agricultural products. Although California produced less than 2 percent of the Nation's cotton crop in 1939, it had 30 percent of the Nation's large-scale cotton farms. It claimed 30 percent of the large-scale crop specialty farms, 40 percent of the large-scale dairy farms, 44 percent of the large-scale general farms, 53 percent of the large-scale poultry farms, 60 percent of the large-scale truck farms, and 60 percent of the large-scale fruit farms of the United States.²

Large-scale enterprises in agriculture, as in other industries, tended increasingly to incorporate and to extend their control over productive facilities by a process of integration. According to the Senate Committee on Education and Labor—

It is estimated that there are as many as 2,500 corporations engaged in agricultural production in California, and that they have been increasing in importance since the close of World War I. They exceed individual and partnership operators in average size; many of them operate lands in other States, have cable addresses, employ regional and district managers, conduct extensive financing, and have other appurtenances of modern large-scale corporations. (Report of La Follette Committee, p. 165.)

Large farms played a more dominant role in the labor market in California than in other regions. The average cash expenditure for labor per farm was nearly four times the national average; in San Joaquin, Kern, Monterey, and Imperial Counties the expenditures were roughly 5, 6, 8, and 10 times the national average, respectively. Only 0.5 percent of all farms in the United States employed five or more laborers, but in California five times this proportion of farms hired labor in such groups. Although constituting only 2.1 percent of all farms in the State, large-

¹Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 47 (p. 17217).

²Idem (pp. 17224-17225).

scale enterprises spent 35 percent of all cash outlays for employment of agricultural laborers. Almost a quarter of such cash outlays, moreover, was contributed by absentee owned or controlled farms, which were dominant among large units.³

Grower-Employer Associations

The growing dominance of large-scale farming in California's agriculture during the twenties was paralleled by a transformation in the pattern of employer-employee relations. Rapid expansion in such intensive crops as cotton, fruit, nuts, and vegetables (which more than doubled in acreage during the decade) served to increase California growers' demands for seasonal labor. Additional workers were made available partly through a more intensive utilization of existing supplies and partly through drawing upon new sources.

One of the most significant developments during the decade was the organization of employers' associations and labor-recruiting agencies. They were preceded in many cases by "area" or "commodity" producers' associations, which exerted various degrees of control over member growers with regard to output, volume of sales allowed on the market, and prices charged for products. "Horizontal combinations" of agricultural producers could be organized more easily in California than elsewhere because of specialization of farms in distinct crop areas, together with a high degree of concentration in ownership and control. The larger and fewer the enterprises in each crop area, usually the easier it was for them to agree to restrict their competitive relations. Small growers who specialized in one or a few crops were often drawn into area or commodity organizations because these groups offered some of the advantages of large-scale production.

As California agriculture became more dependent upon large numbers of seasonal workers to harvest its crops, area and commodity organizations of producers became also employer associations. They concerned themselves with the labor policies as well as with marketing practices of their members; they became increasingly active in standardizing wage rates over wide crop areas to eliminate competitive bidding, in recruiting adequate supplies of labor as a common pool for their members, and in laying down rules governing collective bargaining. Among the more important of these bodies organized along crop or industrial lines were the Western Growers Protective Association, composed mainly of vegetable and melon producers; the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, with headquarters in Salinas, center of an important lettuce-growing district; the California Fruit Growers Exchange, a central organization of citrus cooperative exchanges and packing houses; the California Dried Fruit Association; and the Cannery League of California, an organization of canning companies.⁴

Growers in certain areas of the State solved their common labor problems through labor exchanges or labor bureaus designed to estimate and plan the labor requirements for a coming harvest, to fix a uniform wage

³Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 47 (p. 17226).

⁴Report of La Follette Committee, Part I, General Introduction (pp. 19, 20).

rate to be paid by member employers, and then to recruit workers from whatever sources were available.⁵

The Valley Fruit Growers of San Joaquin County, established in 1921, was the first of the cooperative employer institutions. It succeeded in establishing uniform wage scales on a local basis and later attempted to extend these to the whole Pacific Coast. Subsequently, other groups adopted similar practices; these were the State Farm Bureau Federation, State and local chambers of commerce, and various special growers' associations. The Agricultural Labor Bureau of the San Joaquin Valley became the most highly developed labor-recruiting and wage-fixing agency. It was organized in 1925 under the sponsorship of six county farm bureaus, six county chambers of commerce, and the raisin, fresh fruit, and cotton industries of the San Joaquin Valley. Its main support came from large cotton-ginning companies.⁶

Similar agencies were established for almost every major crop and growing area in the State. One writer estimated that they reduced labor costs by 10 to 30 percent,⁷ partly through keeping wage rates low, and partly through the more efficient allocation of existing labor supplies. Machinery was established for rationalizing and directing labor migrations. Together with improved automobile transportation during the twenties, the recruiting program enabled labor to be moved with less delay from one area to another as the different crops matured.

This system also helped to prevent unionization among farm laborers during the twenties. It increased the bargaining power of the grower-employer and released him from dependence upon any particular group of laborers, since these could be easily replaced from other sources. On the other hand, undoubtedly this one-sided method of setting wages served in time to provoke a corresponding degree of collective action among the workers. Differences between employees and employers were sharpened as workers came to be employed increasingly by the industry rather than by the individual growers on whose farms they worked. Under the system the individual employer tended to lose the sense of personal responsibility for his employees. Thus the structure of employment relations, perhaps more than any other single factor, was responsible for the unprecedented wave of industry-wide or general strikes which occurred later.

Mexican and Filipino Immigration

Grower-employers in California, in addition to utilizing labor more effectively through cooperative agreement, obtained a growing supply of cheap labor through immigration of large numbers of Mexicans, supplemented by Filipinos and migratory whites who were now traveling by automobile. Mexican-born persons more than trebled in California, increasing from 121,176 in 1920 to 368,013 in 1930. In addition, during the

⁵This practice was first used in a simpler form over many specialized agricultural areas in the country during the World War. In some western States employers and laborers met with State farm-labor agents or representatives of the Federal Government to fix uniform wage rates within limited areas. In the Midwestern Wheat Belt standard wage rates were set by State and county "Councils of Defense," often with the county agricultural agents as the prime movers. During a period of severe labor shortage, the purpose was to eliminate competitive bidding among grower-employers, which conduced to a high degree of wasteful labor turn-over.

⁶Report of La Follette Committee, Part I, op. cit.; Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 54 (p. 19861).

⁷Carey McWilliams: *Factories in the Fields* (p. 192).

years 1923-29, some 30,000 Filipinos were admitted into the State,⁸ of whom some 16,000 still remained in agricultural employments by the end of the decade. The volume of this influx created a labor surplus⁹ and severe competition among workers who were predominantly new immigrants accustomed to low standards of living. For the time being it caused a low level of wages to continue and precluded the development of agricultural-labor unionism.

Farmer-employer organizations throughout most of the decade vigorously opposed any attempts to restrict the immigration of Mexicans.¹⁰ Growers preferred Mexicans to whites for field work for substantially the same reason that in earlier decades they had favored Orientals. The industriousness, docility, and tractability of Mexicans were considered among their chief virtues. Dr. G. P. Clements, manager of the agricultural department of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, expressed the view that—

No labor that has ever come to the United States is more satisfactory under righteous treatment. He is the result of years of servitude, has always looked upon his employer as his padron, and upon himself as part of the establishment. (California Citrograph, Vol. XV, November 1929, pp. 28-29.)

White workers, by comparison, were often considered undependable; they were unable or unwilling to perform the necessary farm work at the prevailing wages and working conditions. A Whittier lemon grower related his experience with white and Mexican citrus workers thus:

Crabbing, grumbling, ill-natured complaining of conditions, loud-mouthed Bolshevistic propaganda, and other unpleasant behavior seriously interfered with the [white] crew's activities. Several men quit before night, and the next morning only 2 or 3 out of 15 reported for duty. * * * Mexicans as a rule work quietly and uncomplainingly and are well satisfied with wages and conditions. When a trouble-maker appears, he is discharged at once. (California Cultivator, September 5, 1931, p. 208.)

Mexican agricultural workers in California and other States remained one of the most economically depressed immigrant groups during the twenties. In Los Angeles and other large cities, a disproportionately large percentage of persons supported by private and public welfare agencies were members of this race.¹¹ They faced the usual handicaps initially suffered by aliens—inability to speak English and ignorance regarding the customs and techniques for "getting by" in the complex American economy. The Mexicans' cultural background was an additional impediment to successful occupational climbing. Largely of Indian blood, with a history of bondage, illiteracy, poverty, and suppression going back for several centuries, they tended to be an easy prey to exploitation, not only from grower-employers but also from the more unscrupulous labor

⁸Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 54 (p. 19857); see also Part 47 (p. 17426).

⁹Domestic labor, according to Fuller, was much less scarce during most of the twenties than it had been during the decade 1880-90 or 1900-10. Even on the employers' own terms, the labor supply for most of the years 1920-30 was in excess of demand. (Idem, p. 19873.)

¹⁰Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 54 (p. 19854). Among such groups were the California State Grange, the State Farm Bureau Federation, the Farmers' Union, and numerous producers' associations acting through the Agricultural Legislative Committee, the California Development Association, and the State and local chambers of commerce.

¹¹Emory S. Bogardus: The Mexican Immigrant and the Quota, in *Sociology and Social Research*, Vol. XII, August 1928 (pp. 372-374).

agents or contractors of their own race.¹² During the 1920's these agents had become a more parasitic institution among Mexicans in California than they had been among Chinese and Japanese in earlier years. Mexicans were more dependent upon employers in their labor relationships. They were usually less skilled and less able than Orientals to transfer to better-paid urban employments or to rise to the status of independent farm operators.

Filipinos were recruited for agricultural labor in California when it appeared that Mexican immigration would be restricted during the twenties. They were regarded as the sole remaining substitute in the field of cheap labor, and because of the particular political relationship of the Philippine Islands to the United States, they could not be excluded as a definitely alien element.¹³

Filipino field laborers, like other racial groups, were recruited and employed largely by contractors. In some areas it appeared that they were introduced in order to add one more racial element to an already heterogeneous occupational group and thus further discourage possible unionization. A report of the California Department of Industrial Relations explained this practice as follows:

At times the growers prefer to have the contractor employ a mixture of laborers of various races, speaking diverse languages and not accustomed to mingling with each other. This practice is intended to avoid labor trouble which might result from having a homogeneous group of laborers of the same race or nationality. Laborers speaking different languages and accustomed to diverse standards of living and habits are not as likely to arrive at a mutual understanding which would lead to strikes or other labor troubles during harvesting seasons, when work interruptions would result in serious financial losses to the growers.¹⁴

Growers at first considered Filipinos to be highly desirable laborers, as they were even more docile, low-paid, and hard-working than the more Americanized Mexicans. The Department of Industrial Relations in its report of 1930 described one instance thus:

The Filipino workers are preferred by this company because they are considered more careful workers and because they are not averse to having as many men employed per acre as the company deems necessary, even though the employment of the additional workers reduces the average daily earnings per man employed. The Filipinos are also considered very desirable workers because they are willing to work under all sorts of weather conditions, even when it is raining and the fields are wet.¹⁵

However, the frequent exploitation of Filipinos was an important cause for their later militancy in agricultural-labor unions and strikes; it was also partially responsible for their abandoning farm jobs in large numbers. As a result of substandard working conditions in agriculture and the disparity between urban and rural wage rates, Filipinos more rapidly than

¹²Mexicans in California, Report of Governor Young's Fact Finding Commission, 1931 (p. 131, etc.).

Crop owners entered into an agreement with the contractor for harvesting the crop. The contractor in turn hired the harvest laborers and paid their wages from money advanced by the owner, after deducting varying percentages for his own use. In some cases, it has been shown, workers were hired for possibly \$3 per day, from which the contractor has been known to deduct for himself as high as \$1 per day. In addition, it has been the custom for the owner to withhold 25 percent of the total wages due until the harvesting was completed, when this final lump sum was handed over to the contractor for distribution to the workers to whom it was due. In many instances, dishonest labor contractors faded from the scene with the entire amount, leaving the workers destitute and without funds to carry them on to the next available job.

¹³Transactions of the Commonwealth Club of California, San Francisco, Vol. XXIV, No. 7: Filipino Immigration.

¹⁴State of California, Department of Industrial Relations, Special Bulletin No. 3: Facts About Filipino Immigration into California, San Francisco, 1930 (p. 12).

¹⁵Idem (p. 71).

other races tended to drift into cities and displace whites in urban occupations.¹⁶ They were relatively well-educated upon arrival and were ambitious to improve their position where possible. Few of those who found employment in city trades returned to agriculture.¹⁷ Those who remained in the fields tended to specialize almost exclusively in certain crops, such as asparagus, brussels sprouts, celery, and rice.

Revival of Unionism Among Field Workers

Labor unionism among Mexicans and Filipinos in agriculture was prevented for many years by the obvious weaknesses in their bargaining position. Like the Chinese and Japanese in the prewar decades, they constituted low-paid labor castes whose occupations and conditions of employment were substandard in the eyes of urban workers. Urban trade-unions felt that they were too migratory or casual to organize, and the A.F. of L. agitated instead for greater restrictions on immigration. Some observers argued that Mexicans in particular were not educated to the level that unionism required,¹⁸ though the rise of powerful labor movements in Mexico would have seemed to belie this. Filipinos as a small minority in competition with whites were subjected during the late twenties to mob violence reminiscent of the anti-Oriental riots during the 1880's and 1890's.

The immediate cause for several riots, as in Exeter in 1929, was attributed to the Filipinos' interest in white women. It was apparent, however, that the underlying factor was economic competition with whites. As explained by the California Department of Industrial Relations—

The question of the displacement of white labor by the Filipino was a vital factor in the antagonism that was aroused between the races. The fact that Filipinos found it necessary to hire white female entertainers only added to the tension of the situation, and afforded the spark which fanned the racial hostility into open warfare. (Special Bulletin No. 3, p. 76.)

The discrimination which Mexicans and Filipinos periodically encountered as distinct alien minorities in the communities in which they worked ultimately had the effect of stimulating them to organize in self-protection. Members of each race tended to withdraw within their own group, in associations whose ties were stronger than those of occupational interest alone. Like other immigrants, they settled in separate colonies in which their own language, customs, and institutions were maintained.

New institutions served to facilitate the adjustment of Mexicans and Filipinos to their new social environment. Their brotherhoods, mutual-aid societies, and protective associations served a double purpose. They provided a fuller social life and at the same time sought to protect the immigrant's legal and economic rights in his occupation. These institutions were a preliminary groundwork for the development of a "job-conscious" labor-union movement among these two racial minorities.

Mexicans, although numerically far superior, did not encounter the degree of hostility faced by Filipinos. The former were more native to

¹⁶This was especially true in hotel and restaurant occupations. According to *Organized Labor* (official organ of California Building Trades Council), May 12, 1928, the Filipinos in San Francisco were "forcing their way into the building industry, many of them working as engineers, painters, electricians, carpenters, helpers, and laborers." (California Department of Industrial Relations, Special Bulletin No. 3, p. 73.)

¹⁷Transactions of Commonwealth Club, Vol. XXIV, No. 7 (p. 313).

¹⁸E. Bogardus, in *Journal of Applied Sociology*, May 1927 (pp. 470-488).

California and were accepted as such. They did not enter nonagricultural trades in competition with whites in the same proportion as did Filipinos. Most important, they had a definite status either as American citizens or as Mexican nationals represented by their consuls. Consular officials were perhaps their main source of protection in California. On numerous occasions in later years these officers meditated labor disputes, served as official representatives in collective-bargaining agreements, and even organized labor unions among their compatriots.

The disadvantage of their economic position had prompted Mexican field laborers on a few occasions to organize. As early as 1903, as previously noted, Mexican and Japanese workers in the Oxnard area of Ventura County had struck spontaneously to win increased wages and eliminate contractors from the beet fields.¹⁹ The I.W.W. subsequently had organized and led a few strikes in which Mexicans and other races participated. Some of the doctrines of this organization were later carried over into separate Mexican unions.

There is some fragmentary evidence that attempts were made as early as 1922 to organize Mexican farm workers in California as a distinct group. A 3-day celebration in observance of Mexican independence was held in Fresno in September of that year, at which time it was reported that Mexicans were endeavoring to form a grape pickers' union in the San Joaquin Valley.²⁰ A small union was also organized by Mexicans in Brawley (Imperial County), during a few months of the cantaloup season in 1922. Sporadic unorganized strikes meanwhile had been breaking out among Mexican field workers for years, and continued throughout the twenties and thirties.²¹

The first stable organization including Mexican farm laborers was begun in 1927. In November of that year, a committee of the Federation of Mexican Societies met in Los Angeles. A resolution was adopted asking the numerous mutual-aid and benefit associations to lend their financial and moral support to the organizing of Mexican workers into labor unions.²² Following this meeting, local unions were organized in Los Angeles and other southern California centers. These in turn combined to form the Confederation of Mexican Labor Unions, or C.U.O.M. (*Confederacion de Uniones Obreras Mexicanas*). A constitution for the new organization, adopted in March 1928, was modeled after that of the Regional Confederation of Labor in Mexico (the C.R.O.M.). Its principles reflected in part the influence of American leftist organizations, such as the I.W.W. and the Communist Party.²³ The "declaration of principles" called for restriction of Mexican immigration and abolition of employment agencies and commissaries. In addition, it endorsed the "class struggle" and favored the "integration into a single union of all labor in the world to combat international finance."²⁴

¹⁹See Chapter V (pp. 53-54).

²⁰San Francisco Examiner, September 16, 1922.

²¹Paul S. Taylor: *Mexican Labor in the United States* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1928), Vol. 1 (p. 53).

²²Mexicans in California, Report of Governor Young's Fact Finding Commission, 1931 (p. 123).

²³E. S. Bogardus: *The Mexican in the United States* (University of Southern California Press, Los Angeles, 1934, p. 41).

²⁴Constitucion de la Confederacion de Uniones Mexicanas, Los Angeles, March 23, 1928.

Radical labor organizers appear to have been working within the Mexican mutual-aid societies during the late 1920's. Most of their organizing activity was sporadic and individualistic until the policy of revolutionary dual unionism was put into practice by the Communist Party in the early 1930's, when the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union of the Trade Union Unity League was formed.

Membership in the newly formed organization fluctuated widely because of the migratory and casual nature of the Mexican farm workers' employment. Total membership in May 1928 was estimated at 2,000 to 3,000 in some 20 locals in southern California communities: Los Angeles, El Modena, Garden Grove, Palo Verde, Orange, Atwood, Stanton, Santa Ana, Talbert, San Fernando Anaheim, Gloryetta, Santa Monica, Placentia, Buena Park, Moor Park, La Jolla, Corona, Fullerton, San Bernardino, and Colton.²⁵ By March 1929 the number had dwindled to only 200 to 300 members.²⁶

One of the first Mexican locals formed as a unit of the Confederation was La Union de Trabajadores del Valle Imperial, organized in April 1928 largely through the efforts of Carlos Ariza, Mexican consul at Calexico. Later it changed its name and incorporated as the Mexican Mutual Aid Society. Shortly afterward some 70 members of the union participated in a strike which aroused considerable interest among observers, as well as violence from local authorities.

Early in 1928, the union, in attempting to improve the conditions of its members, petitioned the El Centro Chamber of Commerce to act as intermediary between workers and growers in revising wage rates. This the chamber refused to do. The union at the same time sent to each grower in the Imperial Valley a set of courteously worded written demands for wage increases and abolition of contractors. Growers were then preparing to sign up with labor contractors for the cantaloup-harvesting season, and they refused these demands, feeling that some were exorbitant and that the union did not represent the majority of Mexican laborers in the valley. The union leaders had hoped to settle the issues through peaceful arbitration, but some members went on strike.

Immediate and strenuous opposition to the union and its activities was evinced by growers and local authorities, and the strike was soon broken through wholesale arrest of participants. Nevertheless, some gains were won for Mexican laborers in the valley. Although the growers refused to deal with the union, most of them agreed to pay certain standard rates demanded. Also while the major issues—abolition of labor contractors, improved housing, and proper insurance under the workmen's compensation act—remained unsettled, some improvements developed as an aftermath of the strike. A revised contract, prepared with the assistance of State officials, eliminated the more objectionable features of the labor-contractor system. The practice of withholding 25 percent of the wages until the completion of the harvest season was abolished; weekly pay days were established; and the grower, instead of the contractor, was required in future to assume full responsibility for complete payment of wages.²⁷

In addition to the Imperial Valley incident, two spontaneous or unorganized strikes among Mexican and other workers in California were reported officially in 1928. One, in October, involved an undetermined number of pea pickers in Monterey County, and the other, in November, about 80 cotton pickers in Merced County. In neither of these were the results recorded.²⁸

²⁵Adelante, El Unico Periodico, Viernese, May 4, 1928.

²⁶See Porter Chaffee: Organization Efforts of Mexican Agricultural Workers, unpublished manuscript of WPA, Federal Writers Project, Oakland, Calif., 1938 (p. 15).

²⁷For a fuller discussion of this incident see Paul S. Taylor: Mexican Labor in the United States, Vol. I (pp. 52-56). See also Mexicans in California, Report of Governor Young's Fact Finding Commission.

²⁸Labor Disputes in Agriculture, 1927-38. (List compiled by Josiah C. Folsom, associate economist of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.)

The Mexican union remained quiescent in the Imperial Valley until 1930, when its members were involved in a spontaneous strike of much larger proportions. For several years thereafter the unionization of Mexican field workers in California was under the domination of the Communist Party's Trade Union Unity League.

Revival of Unionism Among Shed Workers

Unionism began to revive among fruit and vegetable packing-shed workers at about the same time that Mexican field laborers were being organized. Collective action for several years had been informal, consisting of mutual understandings among the workers who migrated regularly to packing sheds throughout California and Arizona. If a grower or packer "chiseled" on the accepted wage scale, employees collectively avoided the job from the beginning or carried out job action and "quickie" strikes at the height of the season.²⁹ Field workers of various racial groups had also used such practices to some degree, as had the Japanese before the war.³⁰

Informal methods of collective bargaining began to be utilized by late 1927 and 1928, in response to a changing structure in various agricultural industries. The fruit-and-vegetable-packing industry, for example, had become concentrated in larger units and more centralized in administration as a result of adopting new and improved mechanized processes. Then in the fall of 1927 growers and packers of lettuce in the San Joaquin Valley formed an employer marketing organization known as the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, with headquarters in Salinas.

The association in April 1928 attempted to apply an average wage cut, reported to be about 30 percent, throughout the lettuce-packing industry. Packing-shed workers responded almost immediately with an industry-wide walk-out. Recognized leaders among the workers, some of whom had been through literally dozens of "job-action" strikes during the past decade or more, called a mass meeting at the Labor Temple in Salinas to organize the strikers.³¹

The need for an established labor union with support from other groups was recognized in view of the strongly organized position of the employers. After considerable internal opposition from a minority, the strikers applied for and received a charter from the A.F. of L. as the Fruit and Vegetable Workers' Union Local 18016, Monterey County. The union was almost ruined by the strike, although the wage scales in the lettuce-packing industry were maintained. When the packing season closed, late in the fall, less than 200 paid-up members remained out of an original 800 or more.³²

Members of F.V.W.U. No. 18016 participated in another strike the following year, after most of them had migrated to the Imperial Valley

²⁹Thus the San Francisco Examiner for July 25, 1926, reported that a 2-day strike of pear packers ended with an agreement between workers and plant officials. Officials of the Santa Clara Pear Growers Association agreed to pay 6½ cents per box, a raise of one-half cent per box.

³⁰Rajani Kanta Das: *Hindustani Workers on the Pacific Coast*, Leipzig, 1923 (pp. 29-32).

³¹A. Alston: *A Brief History of the Fruit and Vegetable Industry of the Pacific Coast* (unpublished), (pp. 4 and 5).

³²Alston, *op. cit.* (p. 5).

The charter of a Watsonville local union for Santa Cruz County having the same name but a different number was not obtained until late summer. This union died within a year.

of southern California to pack winter fruits and vegetables. Unrest was prevalent in the valley during the winter season of 1929-30. Overproduction of winter vegetables had resulted from the large acreages under cultivation and a heavy average yield per acre. In order to avoid "spoiling the market," organized shipper-growers used practices which had the effect of reducing the earnings of packing-house workers. Extra inspectors were hired to enforce more careful packing and, incidentally, to slow down production so as to allow only a certain amount to reach the market on a sort of "prorating" basis. Workers complained that they were forced to put up a "world's-fair pack" and in some instances had to repack and reload cars which already had been filled. Packers and loaders, paid by the piece rate, claimed that under this new policy they had to do almost twice the regular amount of work for the same pay.³³

The union called a mass meeting and formulated a flexible schedule of wage demands—5 cents per box or \$1 per hour for packing and wrapping, and other work to be paid in proportion. Committees were formed to represent shed workers in different packing centers of the valley—Brawley, El Centro, Holtville, Heber, and Calexico. A central committee, composed of one representative from each town, was elected to negotiate for the whole area.

A strike was called, which lasted for 10 days. Trimmers, who were paid by the hour, walked out in sympathy with packers and loaders. The strike was only partially successful, and the central committee of the union succeeded in winning agreements from only 17 out of 40 shippers in the valley. The packing-shed workers had not been organized or instructed adequately beforehand, and a rumor that the committee was calling the men back to work in order to submit the issues to arbitration broke the united front of the strikers. The final outcome was maintenance of the old wage scales and a compromise gain for the union through dismissal of extra inspectors.³³

F.V.W.U. No. 18016 declined soon after. A small group retained the charter for some time after the main body of members had withdrawn, but finally, in the fall of 1931, it was returned to A.F. of L. headquarters with only 12 paid-up members in the union and \$75 in the treasury.³³ Unionism did not develop again on a significant scale for several years.

³³Alston, *op. cit.* (p. 5).

CHAPTER VIII.—Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union

Revolutionary Unionism in California Agriculture

During the thirties, California witnessed the largest strikes in the history of American agriculture. Labor-employer friction was generated in many farming regions throughout the United States as one aspect of the severe depression during this period. In California such friction increased in a framework of extraordinarily large-scale farming with its extreme dependence upon casual and migratory seasonal laborers. Under left-wing leadership, wage disputes in agriculture were broadened to the proportions of widespread and intense class conflict.

Labor trouble in the form of strikes and race riots began on a serious scale during the beginning of the depression in 1929 and 1930. The first shock of price declines on the produce market, combined with unemployment, increased job competition, and wage cuts in the labor market, provoked spontaneous protest movements among agricultural workers. Such militancy, however, soon declined under the pressure of a deepening depression. Unemployment increased steadily from 1929 to mid-1933, and facilities for organized relief were inadequate to meet the need. Some of the most intensive labor-using crops in California were grown in proximity to large urban centers; agriculture consequently tended to become a catch-all for the displaced from other industries and trades. A growing labor surplus led to cutthroat competition for jobs and to continuous wage cutting. In some of the most important growing areas, wage levels of 35 to 50 cents per hour in 1929 and 1930 declined to 15 to 16 cents by the spring of 1933. The collective-bargaining power of agricultural workers was weakened and their efforts to organize in self-protection had little success.

California and other States experienced a resurgence of economic activity during mid-1933, under the stimulus of the NRA. Simultaneously farm-labor unionism revived. Public relief was established on a more adequate basis than before, and many unemployed were drawn back to urban trades, while the general level of prices and nonfarm wages rose. Although the labor provisions of the National Industrial Recovery Act did not apply to farm workers, the latter did not regard themselves as an isolated segment of the working class. The unionizing crusade and strike psychology prevalent in urban centers soon permeated rural areas in which seasonal workers were employed in large numbers. Improvements in wages and hours lagged in agriculture, in California particularly, owing to a continually heavy migration of dispossessed from other States. The unfavorable contrast with rising standards in urban industries intensified the unrest among farm workers. Agricultural-labor unions grew rapidly in number and size of membership, and by late summer and fall a wave of general strikes was rising, in a series of crops, in many counties.

Spearheading the revival and expansion of the labor movement in California agriculture was the Trade Union Unity League controlled by the Communist Party of the United States. The T.U.U.L., as pointed

out previously,¹ had been established as a separate federation in opposition to the American Federation of Labor, and its organizing efforts were directed toward the unskilled laborers largely ignored by the A.F. of L. These it hoped to organize into militant unions which would function as part of a world revolutionary movement.

The T.U.U.L. carried out its most ambitious organizing campaign in agriculture among seasonally employed casual and migratory workers of California. Farm enterprises in this State were among the most "capitalistic," class divisions were most pronounced, and class war was considered most likely. California's farm laborers, furthermore, suffered numerous special disabilities because most of them were members of non-white racial minorities. An article in the *Daily Worker* as early as 1929 had stressed the importance of mobilizing "this most exploited section of the working class."

An aggressive campaign of organizing casual farm workers in openly revolutionary unions and conducting strikes of unprecedented proportions led to intense and violent conflict. Grower-employers, many of whom already belonged to marketing associations and labor exchanges, for protection of their common economic interests, now organized special anti-union employer associations. New union tactics for striking and picketing were matched by new methods for breaking strikes and suppressing agitation. Other groups, ordinarily having no direct or immediate interest in wage disputes on the land, were frequently drawn into organized labor-employer conflicts. Strikes jeopardized the incomes of people throughout an entire community or crop area and often faced violent opposition from such groups as well as from employers. On the other hand, the methods which extra-legal vigilantes and the forces of law and order used to break strikes were interpreted in many neutral quarters as a serious danger to the civil liberties of the public.

Farm-labor strikes throughout the thirties, long after the T.U.U.L. had declined, continued to be larger and more numerous than in previous decades. A pattern of organized group conflict and violence remained imbedded in California's agricultural labor relations.

Origins of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union

The T.U.U.L. received its initial test in agriculture during January 1930, in a second outbreak among Mexican laborers in the Imperial Valley. Starting on a local scale, a spontaneous strike developed to proportions far surpassing the small walk-out of 1928.² At its peak it was reported to have involved as many as 5,000 field workers of Mexican and other racial origins. The *Communist Daily Worker* of January 6, 1930, pictured it as—

* * * the beginning of mass rebellion by all the scores of thousands of bitterly exploited Mexican, Filipino, Hindu, Japanese, and Chinese agricultural laborers who slave for the big open-shop fruit growers and packers under conditions bordering closely on peonage.

At the outset the Mexicans were for the most part members of the conciliatory Mexican Mutual Aid Association, which had been involved in the 1928 incident, but this organization soon lost control when the Trade

¹See Chapter III (p. 19).

²See Chapter VII (p. 77).

Union Unity League entered the field. The T.U.U.L. dispatched organizers to the valley to assume leadership and direction of the strike, to create a new organization, and recruit new members. The demands of the strikers were formulated and given wide publicity: A 25-percent increase in wages above the prevailing average of \$1.25 to \$1.50 per day, abandonment of piece rates, abolition of the contractor system, recognition of workers' "job committees," and rehiring of strike participants and union members without discrimination.³ Other affiliates of the Communist Party, like the Workers International Relief and the International Labor Defense, mobilized material and legal aid to support the T.U.U.L. organizers and their strike followers.

The bold bid of the Trade Union Unity League for leadership was at first rejected by Mexican workers, who were the decisive element in the strike. The Mutual Aid Association resented the Communist activity in the strike. At one strike meeting in Brawley, association spokesmen denied the floor to representatives of the "red" T.U.U.L. and condemned the literature it was circulating.⁴ Though the T.U.U.L. finally gained major control, it was not immediately successful, and the strike collapsed.

There were additional reasons for the failure of the strike. The growers and local authorities used substantial violence to suppress the movement.⁵ Strikers were inadequately prepared and poorly organized, lacking cohesion in their ranks. The strike was the first in a series of unformulated protests by a group of substandard and economically insecure workers. It was too large in scope to be handled by the Mexican Mutual Aid Association of the Imperial Valley, a conservative nationalistic labor organization with neither the will nor the experience necessary to carry on large-scale and sustained collective action. The T.U.U.L.'s efforts, on the other hand, merely brought confusion and collapse. Out of the struggle, however, the latter organization did develop a new and distinct affiliate for farm workers, the Agricultural Workers Industrial League.⁶

A second spontaneous strike broke out in the Imperial Valley during February 1930. This movement, involving several hundred shed workers, most of them native white lettuce packers and trimmers, began as a local walk-out in the southern end of the valley and spread rapidly to several major packing centers—Brawley, Holtville, Calexico, and El Centro. The main issues centered in the wage scale; the strikers demanded 5 cents per crate or \$1 per hour as against the 3 cents per crate or 70 cents per hour voted by the organized shippers in a special wage conference.⁷

³Daily Worker, January 6 and 7, 1930.

⁴Brawley News, February 15, 1930.

⁵The Daily Worker in its issue of January 18, 1930, charged that the local Mexican consul cooperated with immigration authorities in arresting and deporting strikers who were Mexican citizens.

⁶Daily Worker, January 23, 1930.

⁷Brawley News, February 12, 1930 (p. 1).

Several enterprises acceded to the strikers' demands after more than 2 weeks had passed, and on February 28 a compromise settlement involving concessions from both sides was reached. The demand of strikers in the northern half of the valley, for an increase from 70 cents to \$1 per hour, was settled at the compromise rate of 80 cents. In the southern section, where piecework rates were paid, employers granted a compromise increase from 3 to 4 cents per crate.⁸

Again the efforts of T.U.U.L. organizers to edge their way into a strike and to assume control were unsuccessful.⁹ The A.W.I.L. headquarters in the Imperial Valley meanwhile hummed with activity in preparation for the coming spring cantaloup harvest. Numerous meetings were held to organize and formulate demands for increased wages and improved working conditions. The union was successful in winning members away from the Mexican Mutual Aid Association, and recruited workers from many other racial stocks. Its preparations, however, were thwarted by the local authorities. The Brawley News reported that in April a series of raids, carried out "in anticipation of the coming opening of the cantaloup season," netted 103 arrests, including Americans, Filipinos, Japanese, and Mexicans.¹⁰ Eight union leaders subsequently were convicted of criminal syndicalism. Elaborate precautions were taken against a strike; according to the News of April 17, 1930, "it was officially stated that the county has purchased more tear-gas gun, shells, and bombs than ever before."

Other minor walk-outs occurred as immediate aftermaths of the labor struggles in the Imperial Valley. Later in the year 300 unorganized lettuce workers went on strike in Santa Barbara County.¹¹ None of these developments appeared to have been under direct union influence. Widespread arrests of the more active leaders and members seemed to have limited temporarily any effective action on the part of the union. Labor unionism underwent a general decline in membership and strength during the worst depression years—1930-32. The A.W.I.L., nevertheless, was developing a potent organization through various Communist channels connected with the Trade Union Unity League.

The Communist Party focused its attention on organizing the growing numbers of unemployed in urban and rural centers. This program facilitated the later unionizing of agricultural workers, since they were a disproportionate part of the unemployed in many California towns.¹² Unemployed councils constituted effective pressure groups agitating for more adequate relief. Hunger marches and demonstrations were organized in numerous counties, and plans were made for a concerted protest march to Sacramento, the State capital.¹³

The Communist Party strengthened its following among the agricultural workers also, by upholding the rights of racial minorities. Filipinos in particular were being subjected to mob violence from whites in a series of race riots in California and other States. The Daily Worker, as spokesman for the Party, condemned the outbreaks. After a riot in the Salinas-Watsonville area early in January 1930, the paper announced

⁸Monthly Labor Review (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington), April 1930 (p. 24).

⁹C. B. Moore, secretary of the Western Growers Protective Association, termed it an "un-called-for strike." He stated that there was no organization with which the striking packers were affiliated unless it were the A.W.I.L. of the Trade Union Unity League. Brawley News, February 18, 1930.)

¹⁰Brawley News, April 15, 1930.

¹¹Josiah C. Folsom: Labor Disputes in Agriculture, 1927-38.

¹²Paul S. Taylor and Tom Vasey: Contemporary Background of California Farm Labor (in Rural Sociology. Vol. I, No. 4, December 1936, pp. 401-419).

¹³Western Worker (San Francisco). January 1, 1932; August 15, 1932; and December 5, 1932.

that the agricultural workers' section of the Trade Union Unity League would begin an organizing drive in the Pajaro Valley in order to combat race conflict. Representatives of the Workers International Relief and International Labor Defense were sent to Watsonville to help Filipinos who had been arrested and beaten during the disturbances. Protest meetings to agitate against race discrimination were organized in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Oakland.¹⁴ Mexican and Filipino beet workers and asparagus cutters were reported attending organization meetings called by the Agricultural Workers Industrial League in Sacramento County during the spring of 1930. Joint meetings of local unemployed councils and branches of the A.W.I.L. were also held in Stockton and other central California towns.¹⁵

Strikes in California agriculture remained at a low ebb during the depression years—1930-32. Altogether, 10 occurred, of which only 3 involved as many as a thousand workers. The A.W.I.L. led or actively participated in the largest strikes. All were short-lived and unsuccessful, partly for the reason that they were unplanned and spontaneous protests against the continued wage decreases and poorer working conditions¹⁶ made necessary by low farm prices. They did nevertheless furnish testing grounds in which the T.U.U.L. was able to develop organizing techniques and strike strategy, put to use later in larger struggles.

Cannery Worker's Strike, Santa Clara County, July 1931

The first agricultural strike in which the Trade Union Unity League again became active took place in Santa Clara County in July 1931. A few months earlier a number of Italian and Spanish workers had organized an independent local body known as the American Labor Union. It was short-lived and limited in scope, including at its peak not more than 1,100 workers. It took part in numerous small protest strikes throughout the Santa Clara Valley, but was involved in no major struggles until the summer of 1931. Then a 20-percent wage slash provoked a spontaneous strike in one of the plants of the California Packing Corp. on July 30, and the walk-out spread rapidly to other canneries throughout the county.¹⁷

The Trade Union Unity League succeeded in getting control of the strike shortly after it broke out and won over most of the membership of the American Labor Union. The Agricultural Workers Industrial League meanwhile had changed its name to the Agricultural Workers Industrial Union. While leading the Santa Clara strike it again changed its title,

¹⁴Daily Worker, January 29, 1930.

¹⁵Idem, April 5, 1930.

¹⁶Strikes in agriculture and allied industries during these years took place as follows (asterisks mark the strikes in which the A.W.I.L. was involved):

	County	Crop or occupation	Number
1930: January	Imperial	Field workers	*5,000
February	Imperial	Lettuce shed-workers	*700
November	Santa Barbara	Lettuce workers	300
1931: September	San Luis Obispo	Vegetable workers	75
July	Santa Clara	Cannery workers	*1,500
1932: April	Santa Cruz	Lettuce workers	47
May	Tehama	Peach thinners	50
May-June	San Mateo	Pea pickers	*1,500
October	Santa Barbara	Tomato pickers	150
November	Solano	Fruit trimmers	*400

¹⁷San Jose Mercury Herald, July 31, 1931.

this time to the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union or C.&A.W.I.U. as it was to be known for the next 2 years. Demands were formulated by the union leadership: 40 cents per hour instead of the prevailing 30 cents; time and a half for overtime, free transportation, union recognition, and rehiring without discrimination against union members and strike participants.¹⁸ The strikers were faced with intimidation and suppression from local authorities, provoked in part by the aggressive tactics of the union. Open mass meetings and parades were broken up by police. Large numbers of special deputies were reported sworn in, riots occurred, and numerous strikers were arrested.¹⁹ The strike was lost and none of the union demands were met by the employers. The rank and file was disillusioned with the C.&A.W.I.U., and for the remainder of its career the union had little or no influence in the canning industry in California.

The basic pattern of union demands and strike tactics which the C.&A.W.I.U. developed in the Santa Clara affair was repeated many times in subsequent strikes. Some modifications of the principle of union recognition were later made: Preferential hiring of union members through the union as intermediary; nonreemployment of strikebreakers; election of rank and file workers' committees to negotiate with employers, etc.²⁰

The C.&A.W.I.U. led no other important strikes for almost a year after the failure in Santa Clara County. The Trade Union Unity League and other Communist affiliates in California were too deeply preoccupied with organizing urban unemployed to agitate for improved relief provisions.

Pea Strike at Half-Moon Bay, May 1932

A brief and unsuccessful bid for strike leadership was made by the C.&A.W.I.U. in May 1932. A reduction in piece rates from 75 cents to 40-50 cents per sack provoked a spontaneous strike among the pea pickers in the vicinity of Half-Moon Bay (San Mateo County), which soon involved, according to the claims of union spokesmen, about 1,500 Filipino, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Italian workers.²¹ C.&A.W.I.U. organizers gained control over the walk-out shortly after it developed. Union spokesmen demanded restoration of the wage cut and other provisions, such as improved housing, free medical service, and abolition of the \$4 rental charged to pea pickers for living quarters.²¹ The walk-out lasted only 24 hours; the C.&A.W.I.U. discontinued it in recognition of its inadequate organization and preparation and in the face of intimidation from many well-armed special deputies.²²

Orchard Pruners' Strike, Solano County, November 1932

The first strike deliberately organized beforehand by the C.&A.W.I.U. occurred in Vacaville (Solano County), in November 1932. From then until its conclusion in January 1933, the strike remained under the control

¹⁸Porter M. Chaffee: *A History of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union* (unpublished manuscript), WPA Federal Writers Project, Oakland, Calif., 1938 (pp. 100-104).

¹⁹Idem (pp. 104-110).

²⁰Idem (pp. 112-114).

²¹Western Worker, June 15, 1932.

²²Chaffee, op. cit. (pp. 123-124).

of the union. The C.&A.W.I.U. had been organizing fruit workers in the district for several months previously. A walk-out, starting on the ranch of U. S. Congressman Frank Buck, rapidly spread to other farms to embrace some 400 Mexican, Filipino, and white workers.²³ The union formulated demands that were to be repeated many times in subsequent strikes: Basic minimum wage of \$2.50 for an 8-hour day; time and a half for overtime; free transportation and work implements; union recognition; cessation of evictions; and rehiring without discrimination on grounds of race, color, or union affiliation.²³

Police and strikers clashed during a meeting shortly after the walk-out began, and numerous arrests were made. Special deputies were recruited, and additional armed deputies were sent into the locality from other areas. Open-air meetings ended in further clashes between strikers and the forces of law and order. "Outraged citizens" formed a local vigilante organization and were reported to have kidnapped certain organizers, clipped their hair, and applied red paint to their persons.²⁴ Outside aid for the strikers was mobilized by the Workers International Relief, the International Labor Defense, and other Communist affiliates. In courtroom trials of arrested organizers, the defendants inserted propagandistic speeches into their testimony for purposes of publicity.

Late in January the rank and file voted to discontinue the strike, after the growers had steadfastly refused to negotiate with the union. The failure of this attempt was laid to faulty timing; the strike had been called during the pruning season, whereas it would have been more effective at harvest time, when the growers would have been most vulnerable to crop losses and most dependent upon their workers.

State-wide Unionism and General Strikes in 1933

The C.&A.W.I.U. organizing campaign in California agriculture assumed new and more ambitious proportions during 1933. Large numbers of unemployed were returning to work in urban areas, while relief was being established on a more adequate basis by the Federal Government. The Communist Party shifted its attention away from organizing unemployed councils designed to carry out public protest meetings and hunger marches, and undertook a larger and more carefully planned program of mobilizing farm labor in a militant State-wide union organization.

Unrest became widespread among the agricultural workers as their earnings lagged behind nonfarm wages and prices during a period of temporary business recovery. Grower-employers recognized somewhat belatedly that this situation contributed seriously to the violent turmoil in agricultural labor relations. The board of directors of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce at a meeting on September 14, 1933, expressed the view 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 actual strikes, which lent encouragement to similar operations in other sections. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 53, p. 19489.)

²³Western Worker, November 28, 1932.

²⁴San Francisco Examiner, December 5 and 6, 1932.

More critical in tone was a letter to the Associated Farmers from J. A. Dennis, manager of the Edison Land & Water Co., written on July 30, 1934:

At the beginning of the agricultural season of 1933 one or two serious decisions were made by the labor department of this organization that gave the necessary "cause" for which the professional agitators always look. * * * Labor rates were determined at the 1932 level of but 15 cents per hour in the early crop-picking work. It is unnecessary to comment upon this mistake except to stress the fact that we must of necessity be on the alert to avoid giving any cause of creating inquiries in the labor-employer relationship. The 15-cent rate was not in the cards for 1933. Nor was it in the cards for 1932. Labor made many personal sacrifices in their standards of living in accepting this rate in 1932, and it remained an indirect source of dissatisfaction which grew as time passed until in 1933 it became no longer accepted. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 53, p. 19489.)

Other officials seemed to feel that "Red agitation" rather than low wages was primarily responsible for the labor troubles of 1933. Sheriff E. Cooper of San Diego County said:

* * * I find that our troubles now * * * are not serious; they [Communist agitators] are just trying to create a little unrest, trying to work on the poor devil who is trying to make a living for his family. They go into a place, a field where men are working for 15 cents an hour, and try to get them to strike for 20 cents. When those demands are met they increase it to 25 cents, and so on. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 75, p. 27604.)

The spring of 1933 ushered in a series of general or crop-wide walk-outs (most of them under the Communist C.&A.W.I.U. leadership), which affected the more important harvests of California. They began in the spring pea harvest in the Santa Clara Valley and the berry crops of El Monte, east of Los Angeles. They continued during the summer in the sugar-beet, apricot, pear, peach, lettuce, and grape harvests, and reached a climax in the cotton harvest in several counties of the San Joaquin Valley.²⁵ Strikes in California altogether involved some 47,575 agricultural laborers during 1933, according to one estimate. Twenty-five strikes, involving about 37,550 or almost four-fifths of the total, were under the leadership of the C.&A.W.I.U. Of these, 21 strikes, affecting about 32,800, resulted in partial increases in wages, while 4 strikes, affecting 4,750, were lost. Unions affiliated with the A.F. of L. led 2 strikes involving some 2,200; the larger strike of about 2,000 workers won partial gains, while a small walk-out of 200 was lost. Independent unions led 2 strikes, of which 1, affecting 600 workers, gained wage increases, and 1, involving 2,000 workers, failed. Of 3 spontaneous strikes, 2 were successful and the results of 1 were not recorded.²⁶

Elaborate planning and an intricate organizational structure lay behind this movement. At conferences of the T.U.U.L. and C.&A.W.I.U. executive council, detailed reports were drawn up regarding wages and working conditions in various parts of the State. Union strategy for strike action and collective bargaining was formulated on the basis of this information. The C.&A.W.I.U. headquarters for the western district was maintained in San Jose, and its jurisdiction extended over California and Arizona. The district was divided into sections and subsections, and these in turn were divided into locals. The locals were made the basic units of the C.&A.W.I.U. organization.

²⁵Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 54 (p. 19948).

²⁶Hearings before House Committee on Labor (74th, Cong., 1st sess.) on HR 6288 (p. 345). (See Appendix D: Farm-Labor Strikes in California, 1933, p. 427).

They were composed of "farm committees" or "camp committees" of representatives elected by workers at mass meetings called by union organizers in the local growing areas. Committees of this kind provided workers with a leadership drawn from their own ranks, and furnished organizers with the necessary connecting link between rank and file workers and the central union executive. No decisions of policy were valid without the majority approval of the membership.

There were only two paid functionaries of the union—the district organizer who received \$5 a week, and the district secretary who was elected at the district conventions. Section organizers were elected at section conventions, and local presidents and secretaries were elected directly by the membership of each local.

The actual functioning of this organization has been colorfully portrayed by one observer:

The T.U.U.L. organizers, who moved in and out of the Union Hall on their way to and from the numerous conferences and organizational meetings that were held throughout the State, received little or no salary. Those sympathetic to the organization fed them and donations would be given to them for the purpose of supplying the other necessities of life. To reach the various agricultural regions of the State, they traveled in dilapidated automobiles or on freight cars. Some of them hitchhiked. When no strike situation prevailed, they visited the shacks and hovels of the migratory workers who usually camped along creek banks or on the edges of fields and orchards where crops were being cultivated or harvested. The organizers would also inquire about wages and working conditions and search out the grievances of the workers, around which the men of the T.U.U.L. hoped to develop a struggle. For the organizers had a belief, a sanguine and yet mechanical faith in upsurges of the working class. They doggedly followed this rule: "Build the organization through struggle!" (Porter M. Chaffee: *A History of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union* (unpublished), p. 119.)

The Spring Campaign

Pea Strike, Alameda and Santa Clara, April 1933

The first general strike (i.e., one involving thousands of workers over a wide crop area) organized by the C.&A.W.I.U. was in the pea fields of Alameda and Santa Clara Counties during April 1933. One of the major grievances around which union organizers were able to gather wide support was the exploitation suffered by the pickers under the labor-contractor system. The Western Worker charged that two contractors in the counties where the strike developed had made a profit of \$60,000 on the labor they had recruited during 1932.²⁷ It was rumored that they had received 32 cents per hamper from growers and returned only 17 cents per hamper to the pickers—a highly improbable situation. (The 17 cent rate was 2 cents below the scale established during the previous season.²⁸)

Preparations for the strike had been made some time beforehand. Early in April at a meeting of C.&A.W.I.U. representatives, a tentative wage scale was established: 32 cents per hamper if the crop was in good condition, and higher if the crop was poor, with the alternative rate of 35 cents per hour if the work was performed on time rates rather than piece rates.²⁹ Delegates at a second union conference voted unanimously

²⁷Western Worker, April 8, 1933.

²⁸Oakland Tribune, April 15, 16, and 17, 1933.

²⁹Western Worker, April 8, 1933.

to strike on April 14 in order to enforce the revised wage demands' for 30 cents per hamper or 1 cent per pound for piece rates, or 35 cents per hour for time rates. The union demanded further that all workers be hired through union committees in each town instead of through private contractors.

The strike was carried out in highly coordinated fashion. Every migrant workers' camp elected a strike committee of 15 members, and each of these local units sent a representative to the general strike committee for aid and advice. Locals were instructed not to settle with owners, contractors, police, or other officials unless a representative of the general strike committee was present. Altogether some 2,000 pickers (Mexican, Filipino, Puerto Rican, and white) were reported to have been called out.

Considerable violence and intimidation attended the strike before it was finally defeated by the local growers and authorities. Arrests and deportations were carried out by police, who were reported to have visited camps and either "run out of the county" or arrested for vagrancy those unwilling to accept offers of employment.³⁰ Local charity agencies were reported as making a special survey among their clients, with the intention of cutting off from county aid all "able-bodied men who refused to work in the fields."³¹ Rumors of "armed bands of Reds" among the strikers stirred up extra-legal opposition from other elements in the community. Guns, blackjacks, clubs, and tear gas were said to have been used in one riot in the community of Decoto on April 15.³² The C.&A.W.I.U. finally called off the strike on April 30 with few if any gains.

A similar walk-out in the pea and beet crops of Santa Barbara County was concurrent with the pea pickers' strike. Though the former was not led directly by the C.&A.W.I.U., the influence of the union was undoubtedly felt. For more than 2 weeks, during early April, approximately 1,000 field workers struck for a wage of 30 cents per hour in place of the prevailing 15-cent rate. The fact that certain labor contractors had failed to pay wages due their workers was reported to be a prime factor contributing to this spontaneous outbreak.³³

Cherry Pickers' Strike, Santa Clara, June 1933

The C.&A.W.I.U.'s leadership of a cherry pickers' strike in the vicinity of Mountain View (Santa Clara County), during June, was more successful than its previous efforts. Early in the month it had organized local unions in small towns adjacent to the cherry orchards. Dissatisfaction among pickers centered on the wage issue. Union spokesmen charged that wage rates had been reduced generally to 20 cents per hour from the previous year's level of 30 cents, despite the fact that the price of cherries had risen to \$80 per ton from the previous year's \$60. Union demands were formulated in the usual way: A basic minimum wage of 30 cents per hour, an 8-hour day, and union recognition.³⁴ To

³⁰Oakland Tribune, April 14, 1933.

³¹Idem, April 15 and 16, 1933.

³²Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 75 (p. 27602).

³³Daily News (Santa Barbara), April 13, 1933.

³⁴Western Worker, June 26, 1933.

enforce this schedule, approximately 500 pickers on June 14 walked out of 12 of the largest ranches in the Santa Clara Valley. The strike soon spread to 8 more orchards, and at its peak was reported to have included 800 to 900 workers.

Local newspapers reported some violence and intimidation of the familiar pattern. Local authorities raided the C.&A.W.I.U. headquarters in San Jose. One fight resulted in a few injuries and arrests when special deputies armed with "pick handles and tear gas" clashed with "Reds * * * well armed with clubs, rocks, bolts, and nuts." The county sheriff was quoted as threatening to call for the State militia, if necessary, to quell the strike.³⁵

The strikers nevertheless won compromise gains, and the general strike committee of the C.&A.W.I.U., on June 24, decided to call off hostilities. Twelve of the larger orchards were reported to have agreed to meet the most important demand—wages of 30 cents per hour. Only a few continued to pay the 20-cent rate.³⁶

In the union's favor was the fact that very little migratory labor was involved. Cherry picking was performed for the most part by resident workers of Spanish extraction, a number of whom were respectable home owners enjoying a higher standard of living than that customarily possessed by California's farm laborers. Community opposition was less united and violent, and the strikers' ability to hold out was correspondingly greater.

Berry Strike at El Monte, June 1933

The next venture of the C.&A.W.I.U. resulted in dismal failure. It was reminiscent of the T.U.U.L.'s earlier policy in 1930 and 1931 of capturing strike leadership from independent or unaffiliated labor organizations. The strike of several thousand workers in berries and other crops in the San Gabriel Valley of Los Angeles County in the summer of 1933 was one of the largest general or crop-wide strikes in which the C.&A.W.I.U. participated. It gave rise to correspondingly extensive and elaborate antistrike preparations on the part of growers throughout California. The conflict had international repercussions, as well, before it was settled.

Approximately 80 percent of the 600 to 700 acres of "bush" berries in Los Angeles County was in the hands of Japanese, organized in their own growers' associations. Picking was paid on a piecework basis and, at the rates prevailing during the 1933 season, the berry workers, predominantly Mexican, could average 15 to 20 cents per hour. Leaders of a locally organized Mexican Farm Labor Union affiliated to the Confederación de Uniones Obreras Mexicanos called a strike early in June to enforce a wage rate of 25 cents per hour in the berry harvest. Local representatives of the C.&A.W.I.U. cooperated with the Mexican organization. Only 500 workers responded, and they soon showed signs of weakening as growers were able to recruit adequate help from a current surplus labor supply.

³⁵Mercury Herald (San Jose), June 17, 18, and 19, 1933.

³⁶Chaffec, op. cit. (pp. 8 and 9).

Communist strike participants, however, were able to gain outside support through their affiliations with other groups. They won temporary control over the conduct of the strike and were able to extend it rapidly. Mass picketing and demonstrations were resorted to. The strike spread to include Mexicans and a minority of Filipinos, numbering altogether some 7,000 workers in the onion and celery as well as in the berry crops of Los Angeles County.³⁷

The Mexican Farm Labor Union grew rapidly in the course of the walk-out, and local branches were formed in each agricultural labor center in the county. Members held a convention in Los Angeles on July 15 in order to federate the new local unions, and formed a permanent organization, the Confederación de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreras Mexicanos del Estado de California, or C.U.C.O.M. The new union extended its membership rapidly during 1933; by early 1934 a member of the executive council estimated that it numbered some 50 local affiliates and 5,000 to 10,000 members.³⁸

The rapidly growing scope of the movement in Los Angeles County soon resulted in outside intervention to attempt a settlement, and in the process left-wing organizers won indirect support for the strike from the Mexican Government.³⁹ Later the Mexican consul took an active part as mediator and spokesman for the strikers. The Japanese consul did not take part in the struggle directly, but cautioned the growers (largely Japanese, as noted) to stay strictly within the bounds of the law. Finally Edward Fitzgerald, Conciliator of the U. S. Department of Labor, entered the discussions.

The El Monte strike was less violent than other large struggles in which the C.&A.W.I.U. participated. A few overt conflicts resulted in arrests, but in view of the duration of the strike and the numbers involved, these occurrences were remarkably few. In fact, according to Lawrence Ross, strategist of the C.&A.W.I.U., the police made a special effort to avoid violence.⁴⁰

Dr. G. P. Clements, manager of the agricultural department of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, attempted to obtain a signed agreement from the Japanese grower-employers. Mexican strike leaders, through U. S. Labor Commissioner Marsh and U. S. Conciliator Fitzgerald, had demanded certain concessions as a prerequisite to any compromise agreement, and finally accepted a raise in wage rates for the pickers to 20 cents per hour and 45 cents per crate, instead of the prevailing 15-cent and 35-cent levels. A conference was then held with strike leaders, representatives of local Mexican unions, and the Mexican Consulate.

Under the domination of the Communist "fraction," however, the labor spokesmen refused to accept the agreement.⁴¹ The strikers at first had demanded only an increase in pay for berry picking (this had been granted). Now that they had the grower-employers "on the run," they

³⁷Western Worker, July 17 and August 7, 1933; also Spaulding: *The Mexican Strike at El Monte* (in *Sociology and Social Research*, Vol. XVIII, 1933-34, p. 575).

³⁸Spaulding, *op. cit.* (p. 578).

³⁹Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 53 (p. 19693).

⁴⁰Western Worker, August 7, 1933.

⁴¹It was the strategy of the leadership, according to Donald E. Marve, attorney for the Mexican Consulate, to bring about a general strike in the entire area by the time the Federal Conciliator arrived. By the end of June 7,000 were on strike in Los Angeles and Orange Counties. (Los Angeles Times, June 25, 1933; San Francisco Examiner, June 30, 1933.)

considered the time propitious for continuing the strike and broadening it so as to make comparable gains in other crops of Los Angeles County.⁴²

This error in strategy soon became apparent, as the C.&A.W.I.U. lost control of the situation and provoked greater opposition from the grower-employers.⁴³ The strike was in effect broken when the growers recruited Japanese laborers and school children from Los Angeles to pick berries. White employers hired white American laborers and stood guard with guns to warn "agitators" away.⁴⁴ The Mexican consul captured control over the strikers from the C.&A.W.I.U. and won a signed agreement entailing compromise gains for the new "liberal union," the C.U.C.O.M.: a minimum wage rate of \$1.50 per 9-hour day, and 20 cents per hour where the work was not steady; recognition of the Mexican union; preferential hiring for its members; and discharge of strikebreakers.⁴⁵

The scale of the strike aroused widespread apprehension among growers in many counties, and they began to prepare for labor trouble in other crops throughout the State. Dr. G. P. Clements in a memorandum written at the time stated: "Unless something is done this local situation is dangerous in that it will spread throughout the State as a whole. In my opinion this is the most serious outbreak of the Mexican workers here."⁴⁶

Campaign of Late Summer and Fall, 1933

The C.&A.W.I.U. held its first district convention shortly after the El Monte strike. The union indulged in self-criticism in the course of "streamlining" its organizational structure and planning a series of more ambitious ventures. To cope with the migratory condition of most agricultural workers, the leaders felt they should form a chain of locals in all important farm, orchard, and cannery centers. These would then render the union more accessible to workers who otherwise might lose contact. The convention also called upon C.&A.W.I.U. members to apply the "boring from within" policy more effectively—to penetrate opposing unions in order to form contacts with dissident elements and thereby win organizations over to the C.&A.W.I.U.

In planning a wave of strikes for the forthcoming summer and fall harvest seasons of 1933, the union defined more clearly the relationships among the local, section, and district groups. The local was to be the

⁴²Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 53 (p. 19693).

⁴³C.&A.W.I.U. strategists themselves were highly critical of their representatives' handling of the El Monte strike. Lawrence Ross, writing in the Communist Party organ, the *Western Worker*, stressed the inadequate preparations. No preliminary study had been made of crop and employment conditions in the fields, and the union demands were simply copied from those of the Santa Clara pea strike. After the walk-out had spread, Party members did not follow a rational policy, including the possibility of a compromise offer from the growers. As a result, their rejection of the growers' agreement to a substantial wage increase ruined the Party members' status among the strikers, and with it any possibility of building a strong foundation for the C.&A.W.I.U. through recruiting new members. Subsequently the strikers turned to the more moderate program of the consul-controlled C.U.C.O.M. (*Western Worker*, Aug. 7, 1933.)

⁴⁴Spaulding, *op. cit.* (p. 579).

⁴⁵See Appendix E: "Agreement between the Confederación de Campesinos Y Obreras Mexicanos (C.U.C.O.M.) and Japanese Vegetable Growers' Associations" (p. 428).

⁴⁶Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 53 (p. 19695).

In other parts of the State Dr. Clements reported that "Frank Palomares of the Agricultural Labor Bureau of the San Joaquin Valley, whom we brought down to assist us in this matter, is afraid that the strike will extend into his district, and left last night to take care of his own job. I am advising the Western Growers Protective Association to have their agents in the Imperial Valley keep an eye on the situation down there so they can nip any general strike in the bud. The other districts have the advantage over us in this respect because the Mexicans live in homes owned by the employers, so whenever they strike they can be evicted and new workers brought in." (Hearings, p. 19695.)

basic unit of organization, and the latter two were to mobilize assistance for it when a struggle developed in any local area.

Profiting from their mistakes in the El Monte incident, C.&A.W.I.U. organizers embarked on a series of more ambitious and successful general agricultural strikes, some of which embraced workers in several counties. These followed a markedly similar pattern, not only in the aggressive strategy employed by the union leadership, but also in the cleavage of interests exposed within each community, and in the techniques of suppression employed by local growers and authorities.

The C.&A.W.I.U.'s efforts during the 2 months immediately following the El Monte berry strike met with varying success. The union obtained valuable experience in an abortive strike at Lodi and other grape-producing areas near Fresno and in a later strike of peach pickers on the famous Tagus Ranch in Tulare County. It recruited and trained many effective organizers of Mexican, Filipino, and white American stock, who later proved effective leaders in a series of large walk-outs, culminating in the great cotton strike of the San Joaquin Valley in the fall of 1933.

Pear Strike in Santa Clara County, August 1933

The first general crop strike undertaken by the C.&A.W.I.U. after its convention was highly successful. It involved approximately 1,000 pear pickers in the regions of Agnew and Milpitas (Santa Clara County), during August 1933. Workers in that area had been thoroughly organized beforehand; at a conference held in San Jose on August 11, 3 days before the strike broke, workers in every orchard in the area had been represented by elected delegates, and a coordinated strike policy had been designed.

The physical or structural aspect of the pear industry in this area was an important element in the success of the strike. The technique of mass picketing commonly employed by the C.&A.W.I.U. was ideally suited to large square orchards situated on main highways and cross-roads. Where pickets in large numbers could be controlled, the dangers of violence and intimidation from growers and law-enforcement authorities were lessened.

The strike was settled within 4 days. Substantial wage gains accrued to the strikers, who returned to work still organized under the C.&A.W.I.U. Though the union had demanded a wage scale of 30 cents per hour instead of the existing 20 cents, agreement was reached on the compromise offer of 25 to 27½ cents per hour.⁴⁷ The strike was notable also for the arbitration efforts of Louis Block of the California Bureau of Labor Statistics. It was the first time that the C.&A.W.I.U. had been given official Government recognition.

Peach Strike, August 1933

The peach strike led by the C.&A.W.I.U. during August 1933, was a more extensive and sustained movement. Starting on a local scale, it developed into a series of both organized and spontaneous walk-outs which blanketed the peach-growing areas in 7 counties—Sutter, Yuba,

⁴⁷Oakland Tribune, August 18, 1933.

Butte, Stanislaus, Tulare, Fresno, and Merced. As in the previous pear strike in Santa Clara County, its success was attributed to the large and compact structure of the peach orchards.

The first signs of unrest appeared in Fresno County early in August, when 130 Mexican pickers, after striking for a wage increase of 2 cents per hour, struck again for a further raise of 5 cents per hour on 5 peach ranches in the vicinity of Parlier and Selma. They justified this action on the ground that the NRA codes had stipulated a minimum wage scale of 27 cents per hour for unskilled labor.⁴⁸

The C.&A.W.I.U., meanwhile, was active in other communities. Pat Chambers, district organizer, unionized some 700 workers on the Tagus Ranch in Tulare County. These men had become dissatisfied with wages reported to be 15 cents per hour, and now, as an organized local, they demanded 35 cents per hour and certain improvements in working conditions. They called a strike on August 14 and placed picket lines around the ranch.⁴⁹

Two thousand peach pickers also walked out of orchards owned or controlled by the California Packing Corp. in Merced County, in a demand for 30 cents per hour in place of the prevailing 15 to 17½ cents. This strike was doubly effective; it not only prevented the harvesting of the peaches, but also rendered the company canneries idle, since these depended on the steady flow of fruit from the orchards.⁴⁹ By the middle of August 4,000 pickers were estimated to be on strike. Growers and police offered stiff resistance. Newspapers reported that deputies and ranch guards were armed with shotguns and rifles in preparation for serious trouble.⁵⁰ Relatively little violence occurred, however, though raids on strike headquarters were carried out, strikers were evicted in large numbers, and a few strike leaders and pickets were arrested.

The threat of a general strike throughout the peach crop tended to bring the growers to terms. Settlements were reached in several localities through the mediation efforts of the California Department of Industrial Relations.⁵¹

First to reach a compromise among the grower-employers was the California Packing Corp. On August 16, 2 days after its employees began their walk-out, the company accepted the recommendations of Timothy Reardon, Commissioner of the State Department of Industrial Relations. The strikers were granted a wage increase from the prevailing 17½ cents per hour to the 25-cent rate, and a 9-hour day. The manager of the Tagus Ranch held for 2 days longer to the 17½-cent scale, which constituted a 2½-cent increase over the scale announced at the beginning of the peach harvest, by the Agricultural Labor Bureau of the San Joaquin Valley.⁵² On August 18, the management finally gave in to pressure from the C.&A.W.I.U. and the State Department of Industrial Relations for a scale of 25 cents per hour.⁵³ Peach growers in the Reedly-Parlier district of Fresno County followed suit the next day. In the presence of Deputy Labor Commissioner Fred Huss, they signed a wage agreement with C.&A.W.I.U. representatives, establishing the

⁴⁸San Francisco Examiner, August 3, 1933.

⁴⁹Hanford Journal, August 15, 1933.

⁵⁰Idem, August 15, 1933; also San Francisco Examiner, August 17, 1933.

⁵¹Kern County Labor Journal, August 18, 1933.

⁵²Hanford Journal, August 18, 1933.

⁵³Kern County Labor Journal, August 18, 1933.

25-cent hourly rate and pledging reemployment of strikers without discrimination.⁵⁴

New conflicts flared in northern California counties less than a week after these strikes had been settled. After an intensive organizing drive had been made by the C.&A.W.I.U. in the vicinity of Gridley (Butte County), 350 pickers struck for higher wages on August 22.⁵⁵ Some violence was reported, including an assault on pickets by armed deputies. A settlement was reached within 2 days, through the mediation efforts of the State Department of Industrial Relations. Two hundred strikers on two of the largest orchards in Butte County⁵⁶ won an agreement stipulating a wage rate of 30 cents per hour—the highest rate in the State for fruit picking.⁵⁷

The strike sentiment spread to the Marysville-Yuba City area of Yuba and Sutter Counties. Though there was no definite organization behind this upsurge, the influence of the C.&A.W.I.U. was felt. Spontaneous mass meetings were attended by several hundred local pickers, who voted for wage increases from the prevailing 25 cents per hour to 30 cents, or from 4 to 5 cents per box; they threatened to strike if these demands were not met. Labor representatives carried on negotiations with growers, a number of whom agreed to pay the higher scale.⁵⁸ Subsequently Sutter County placed a ban upon unlicensed public gatherings.⁵⁹

Several hundred pickers in Stanislaus County went on strike when a formal demand for the 30-cent hourly rate was rejected by the growers. Here the leadership of the strike, at least in the beginning, was in the hands of an independent organization known as the Modesto Farmers and Workers NRA Union. It proposed to establish a union-controlled employment center or exchange, from which growers could hire workers without the intervention of contractors.⁶⁰ After a strike of more than a week's duration, the union settled with the growers for a compromise wage of 25 cents per hour.⁶¹

At this point the independent union came into conflict with an affiliated local of the United Farmers' League which called an open-air meeting under its own name in order to win workers away from the NRA Union. The U.F.L. bitterly denounced the strike settlement, on the ground that the participants, by holding out a little longer, could have won the 30-cent scale they had demanded.⁶²

The substantial gains won by the strikers in this series of walk-outs were due partly to the particular vulnerability of the peach industry already noted. The crop was highly perishable and concentrated on a limited number of large-scale ranches, many of which were owned or operated by outside corporations such as the California Packing Corp. or the Bank of America. Instances of arrests, vigilantism, and violence were few, owing largely to the fact that strikers, by mass-picketing

⁵⁴Fresno Bee, August 20, 1933.

⁵⁵Oakland Tribune, August 22, 1933.

⁵⁶I.e., the Steadman Ranch and the Butte County orchards of California Lands, Inc., affiliated with the Bank of America.

⁵⁷Oakland Tribune, August 22, 1933; Sutter County Farmer, August 24, 1933.

⁵⁸Idem, August 23, 1933.

⁵⁹Idem, August 29, 1933.

⁶⁰Modesto Bee, August 23, 1933.

⁶¹Idem, September 1, 1933.

⁶²Western Worker, September 4 and 11, 1933.

methods, were able to concentrate their forces around the more important orchards. C.&A.W.I.U. organizers could reach the main body of pickers without having to cover large numbers of small ranches. Large-scale operations in the industry served also to standardize wages and working conditions; workers' grievances and strike demands were not so diverse as they would have been in a crop grown on many scattered small ranches run by independent operators. The close financial integration between canneries and peach orchards, furthermore, made it doubly difficult for firms like the California Packing Corp. to withstand strikes.

Sugar-Beet Strike at Oxnard, August 1933

The C.&A.W.I.U. led an unsuccessful strike in the sugar-beet area of Oxnard (Ventura County), at about the same time that the peach industry was in trouble. Union organizers had been active among Mexican and Filipino beet laborers for several weeks. A 17-percent increase in benefit payments to beet growers had been announced on July 29, 1935.⁶³ A few days later the C.&A.W.I.U., together with a local Filipino Protective Union, submitted a schedule of demands to the Beet Growers Association calling for a minimum wage of 35 cents per hour, and a comparable 30- to 50-percent increase in piece rates; an 8-hour day; weekly pay days; free transportation to and from work; union recognition; employment without discrimination for race or union affiliation; hiring through a union shop; and abolition of labor contractors.⁶⁴ A strike was called on August 7, after the growers had refused to consider the union demands. (The local chamber of commerce had announced previously that there were many Mexican relief clients available if a strike occurred.⁶⁵)

The situation remained comparatively peaceful for about 2 weeks. The Oxnard Daily Courier of August 12, 1933, described it as "one of the few strikes in the State that has not been accompanied by either bloodshed or rioting." The growers took certain conciliatory measures almost immediately after the walk-out was called. The Beet Growers Association granted compromise wage increases and agreed to eliminate the use of labor contractors where possible.⁶⁶

The C.&A.W.I.U.'s position was apparently weakened by divisions in its ranks, and by the fact that surplus labor was available for breaking the strike. The Filipinos at first refused to join the Mexicans in the walk-out, and those who remained at work were protected by heavily armed guards.⁶⁷ Mexicans employed at the American Beet Sugar Co. plant in Oxnard were replaced by white Americans when they walked out in sympathy with the field workers.⁶⁸ Although no open conflict occurred for almost 2 weeks, local authorities intimidated the strikers by various means. The Oxnard Daily Courier of August 13, 1933, for instance, reported that "Deputies broke up one possible incipient riot in the alley near the strike headquarters by driving their cars with the

⁶³Oxnard Daily Courier, July 29, 1933.

⁶⁴Western Worker, August 7, 1933.

⁶⁵Oxnard Daily Courier, August 5, 1933.

⁶⁶Idem, August 9, 1933.

⁶⁷Idem, August 7 and 11, 1933.

⁶⁸Idem, August 10, 1933; Western Worker, August 21, 1938.

sirens shrieking at great speed through the crowd of strikers." The strikers also charged that two of their number were forced to go to work under the threat of arrest.

The Mexican Workers Alliance, an organization on the order of a company union, was formed to counteract the C.&A.W.I.U. The local newspaper announced that its purpose was "to serve as a point of contact between the farmer desiring Mexican workers and the Mexican workers desiring to return to work. They have the full cooperation and support of the authorities, the chamber of commerce, and the farmers of the community." (Oxnard Daily Courier, August 15, 1933.)

Estimates of the number on strike differed widely. Union spokesmen claimed 1,000 to 1,200 participants.⁶⁹ The Oxnard Daily Courier, August 15) charged that this was a gross exaggeration, and estimated that fewer than 300 were involved. Other participants were described as "idlers, agitators, and others not identified with labor in beet fields."

The conflict became violent, finally, when a riot occurred between the strikers and deputies on August 18. Five strikers were arrested, and police and deputies were reported by the local newspaper to be patrolling the strike area with "sawed-off shotguns and tear-gas bombs."⁷⁰ The strike was ended officially by the C.&A.W.I.U., 2 days later.

Grape Strike at Fresno and Lodi, September-October 1933⁷¹

The C.&A.W.I.U. made an abortive and unsuccessful bid for leadership of a strike among seasonal workers in the grape harvest in and around Fresno and Lodi during the fall of 1933. This movement was one of the most violent that occurred in California agriculture during the thirties, particularly in the techniques for suppression employed by growers and local law-enforcement authorities.

C.&A.W.I.U. organizers were active among the vineyard workers by mid-August. On August 21, State Labor Commissioner MacDonald announced publicly that a general strike of pickers was impending unless the growers agreed to pay at least 25 cents per hour, as contrasted with the prevailing 12½ to 20 cents, or 1½ cents per tray. The vineyardists refused, offering instead a standard rate of 20 cents per hour. A strike followed in Fresno, during the course of which both growers and workers resorted to direct action. The walk-outs around Fresno and Modesto, inadequately organized beforehand, were broken almost immediately by arrests and imprisonment of the more active leaders.

The union meanwhile was organizing pickers in the Lodi area, and the growers were making counterpreparations. On September 7 some 600 vineyardists at a mass meeting agreed upon a standard wage scale of 1½ cents per tray, as opposed to the pickers' demands for 2 to 4 cents per tray.⁷² Several hundred workers at a mass meeting on September 13 collectively demanded a flat 50 cents per hour and other conditions.⁷³

⁶⁹Western Worker, August 14, 1933.

⁷⁰Oxnard Daily Courier, August 18, 1933.

⁷¹Most of the material on this incident is taken from Hearings before the House Committee on Labor (74th Cong., 1st sess.) on HR 6288; and from an unpublished paper of L. Archibald: The Lodi Grape Pickers' Strike of 1933 (Berkeley, University of California, Apr. 26, 1939).

⁷²Hearings of House Committee on Labor (p. 360).

⁷³Idem (p. 361).

After fruitless negotiation marked by considerable intransigence on both sides, a strike began on September 27, involving more than 500 pickers employed on 150 ranches.⁷⁴ Some compromises were apparently made by both growers and strikers, but they were not sufficient to settle the issues. Local newspapers reported that Lodi growers were now paying a standard 25 cents per hour, while union demands were scaled down to 40 cents per hour, an 8-hour day, time and a half for overtime, and abolition of the contractor system of hiring.⁷⁵ Several vineyardists appeared at strike headquarters and offered to pay pickers 40 cents per hour, but refused to allow the strike committee to designate whom they were to employ. One rancher succeeded in recruiting at the union wage about 40 pickers from the ranks of the strikers, and escorted them to work with the aid of special deputies.

Local authorities used drastic methods to end the trouble on the second day of the strike. The sheriff moved additional deputies into the Lodi area, and 70 special deputies from a loosely formed vigilance committee were later sworn into office by a local justice, with instructions to use "disturbance of the peace charges whenever trouble appeared."⁷⁵

To combat the "guerilla picketing" of the strikers, two deputies in cars were assigned to every carload of pickets, with orders to arrest them for "disturbing the peace" wherever they attempted to interfere with harvesting of the crop. Col. Walter E. Garrison, who became prominent as a leader of the Associated Farmers of California, was selected to head this group of volunteer deputies.

Arrests grew in number as the strike began to affect the picking operations. By the end of the second day, 8 pickets had been arrested. A vigilante raid on union headquarters in Lodi netted 6 strike leaders, who were held on charges of conspiracy to obstruct the law.⁷⁶ By the end of the third day 28 had been jailed.

The situation became more tense as the strikers' ranks were swelled by the arrival of incoming transients seeking employment. The application of a "grape control plan" sponsored by the AAA, which resulted in the discharge of approximately 35 percent of the workers who had remained in the vineyards during the strike, further complicated the problem and gave rise to greater apprehension among local residents.

The strikers held numerous mass meetings in town to formulate further demands.⁷⁷ They threatened that all picking operations would be stopped "even though it required taking pickers from the vineyards."⁷⁸ Approximately 1,000 local townspeople and ranchers held a mass meeting in response to this threat. A sharp division developed between those who desired direct action and those who held out for settlement of the strike by peaceful means. One Lodi businessman and prominent Legionnaire was reported to have suggested that "all they [the strikers] have got is mob rule. Let's beat them to it."⁷⁹ Colonel Garrison and Sheriff Odell led the "peace faction," cautioning against violence.

⁷⁴San Francisco Chronicle, September 28, 1933.

⁷⁵Stockton Record, September 28, 1933.

⁷⁶Modesto Bee, September 29, 1933.

⁷⁷Eight specific demands were drawn up at strikers' meetings: (1) An 8-hour day at 40 cents per hour, with time and a half for overtime; (2) immediate release of all strikers under arrest; (3) recognition of the union; (4) no discrimination against strikers in rehiring; (5) those employed before the walk-out must have first chance in reemployment; (6) all hiring must be done through the union; (7) all nonstrikers who have worked during the strike must be dismissed; and (8) the union is to be the arbitrator of all future labor disputes. (San Francisco Examiner, Oct. 4, 1933.)

⁷⁸Stockton Record, October 3, 1933.

⁷⁹San Francisco Examiner, October 4, 1933.

The following morning several hundred citizens assembled before the union's strike headquarters in Lodi, from which pickets were regularly dispatched. Led by a prominent shipper and vineyardist, who was reported to have shouted, "What are we waiting for? To hell with the peace talk! Let's get them moving!", the vigilante mob charged the ranks of the strikers with guns, clubs and fists, and drove them out of town.⁸⁰ Later attempts by strikers to meet and reorganize were reported to have been broken up by vigilantes with fire hose and tear-gas bombs.⁸¹ As a violent aftermath, a striker shot and killed a ranch foreman and made good his escape.

The strong feeling which the strike had aroused among some elements in the community were indicated in the remarks made by Justice Solkmore of the Municipal Court to strikers brought up before him for trial. These were reported by several newspapers and were published in the Hearings before the Committee on Labor of the U. S. House of Representatives:

Some of you have listened to nit-wits, half-baked radicals. * * * Some of you, I am afraid, are not intelligent enough to know what it is all about. If you were in the right crowd, I would gamble that many of you would go to work at once. I am not attempting to threaten or coerce you. I am warning you, if you insist on jury trials, and if you should be found guilty, you cannot expect leniency from this court. (Hearings of House Committee on Labor, p. 364.)

On October 6, during the preliminary hearings of one striker held for trespassing, the justice declared in a dispute with the defendant's attorney that—

"* * * These men are nothing but a bunch of rats, Russian anarchists, cutthroats, and sweepings of creation. This defendant doesn't know when he is well off if he wants a jury trial. In some places they would take him and his kind and hang them from the town hall."

The attorney interrupted with the comment: "But they wouldn't dare to do that here."

"Don't you be too sure about that. This town may see a few hangings yet."

The attorney insisted: "I want a jury trial."

"Juries be damned," replied the judge. "Juries are reminiscent of medievalism. They are a means of escape for guilty men. If I were innocent, I would rather go before a judge. They usually get twelve boneheads to sit on a jury." (Hearings of House Committee on Labor, p. 1364.)

A change of venue was finally granted the striker defendants, on the ground that they could not obtain a fair trial in the Lodi municipal court.

The unsuccessful conclusion of the Lodi grape strike was not to be explained solely by the effectiveness of the growers and local authorities in suppressing it. Union leaders obviously had failed to organize the pickers adequately beforehand, as was evident from the fact that picking operations continued only slightly below normal throughout the strike. The extreme hostility of the growers was due in part to the exorbitant demands of the strike leaders. In stipulating a wage rate of 50 cents or even 40 cents per hour, the strikers were setting a figure far in excess of the rate currently paid in other crop areas, and there was evidence to show that the growers at the time were unable to grant such demands. That the strike leaders were likewise unwilling to enter into negotiations except on the basis of their own demands was attested by

⁸⁰San Francisco Chronicle, October 4, 1933, and San Francisco Examiner, October 4, 1933.

⁸¹San Francisco Chronicle, October 5, 1933; San Francisco Examiner, October 5, 1933; Stockton Record, October 5, 1933.

their refusal even to meet with Deputy State Labor Commissioner Williamson after the strike had begun. These were doubtful tactics particularly during a period when the demand for labor in the crop was temporarily reduced through a marketing-control program sponsored by the AAA.

*The Cotton Pickers' Strike of San Joaquin Valley, October 1933*⁸²

Largest, most sensational, and most ably organized of all strikes led by the C.&A.W.I.U. was that among cotton pickers of the San Joaquin Valley during October 1933. It was a dramatic climax to the series which had begun in late summer.

The significance of the event is far more than incidental. It exhibits in full detail the essential characteristics of numerous lesser conflicts in California agriculture both before and since, in which ardent organizers agitate and lead, incensed "vigilantes" organize and act, growers, officials, and laborers each overstep the law, and citizens finally cry to the State authorities for peace, if necessary at the hands of troops. (Hearings, p. 19947.)

The "structure of controls" which prevailed in the cotton industry of California tended to generate an unusual degree of labor unrest. The Agricultural Labor Bureau of San Joaquin Valley continually endeavored to standardize wage rates for chopping and picking throughout the cotton-growing area. Several hundred of the largest grower-employers met annually at conferences held in Fresno for this purpose. Large cotton-growing and finance companies, like the Anderson Clayton Co., which ginned about 35 percent of the total production in Arizona and California, could exert disproportionate pressure on individual growers. Cotton farmers could be "kept in line" and made to conform to wage scales and working conditions agreed upon collectively, for their dependence upon production loans and other financial services, provided by banks and processing companies on the security of crop or chattel mortgages, left them little leeway for individual bargaining with their employees.

Chronic unemployment and job competition during the depression years of the early thirties caused an extreme decline in cotton wages, even while the acreage and demand for labor was increasing. Wages for cotton chopping, for instance, fell from \$1.46 per acre in 1930 and \$1.36 in 1931 to 66 cents in 1932 and 72 cents in 1933. Cotton-picking rates underwent comparable changes; from well over \$1 per hundredweight in the late twenties, the scale for picking fell to 40 cents in 1932. Grower-members of the Agricultural Labor Bureau followed their customary practice in 1933 and convened in Fresno late in September to agree upon a standard rate. In view of the decreased labor surplus and growing labor unrest, they set a rate of 60 cents per hundredweight, with the stipulation that they would make no further changes without holding another meeting.

The pickers' reactions to this announcement foretold serious labor trouble. C.&A.W.I.U. agents had been carrying on preharvest agitation, in the southern San Joaquin cotton area, among the pickers of whom more than three-fourths were Mexican. The Communists had

⁸²Except as otherwise noted, the material describing this strike was obtained largely from the account by Paul S. Taylor and Clark Kerr: *Documentary History of the Strike of Cotton Pickers in California, 1933*, in *Hearings of the La Follette Committee*, Part 51 (pp. 18578-18599) and Part 54 (pp. 19947-20030).

won considerable prestige through their leadership of previous strikes in other crops, in which large numbers of cotton pickers had participated, and now the one-sided wage policy of organized growers drove many more pickers to support the C.&A.W.I.U.

The union had recruited and trained a corps of Mexican, Negro, and white organizers from among those who had been involved in earlier strikes. They now formed a nucleus of subordinate leaders over a network of some 19 newly organized local unions throughout the cotton area. A conference of delegates elected by these locals, had been held in the southern cotton district early in September, in preparation for the coming harvest operations. At that time a standard schedule of demands had been formulated, calling for a picking rate of \$1 per hundredweight, as compared to the previous year's rate of 40 cents, abolition of labor contractors, and union hiring without discrimination.

By late September, there were manifest preparations for a large strike in protest against the wage policy of the organized growers. Mass meetings were held on farms and vacant lots in towns, and strike literature and union membership cards were distributed widely. The C.&A.W.I.U. headquarters at Tulare, established at the time of the Tagus Ranch strike, became the organization base. Strikers who had participated in this previous walk-out now furnished the militant nucleus for organizing the cotton pickers.

The union was favored by the late maturity of the cotton crop which was retarded by 2 weeks; thus the organizers had more time to consolidate the ranks of the pickers. Taylor and Kerr described the movement as follows:

*** The excitement of the parades, the fiery talks, the cheering, appealed to the Mexicans particularly, and race discrimination, poor housing, and low pay, especially the latter, were rallying cries which appealed to a class of workers with adequate personal experience to vivify the charges hurled by Communist leaders and rendered exposition of the theories of Karl Marx superfluous. (Hearings, p. 19957.)

The strike began in the southern San Joaquin Valley, centering in Kern, King, and Tulare Counties, where more than half the cotton acreage of the State was to be harvested. It grew to involve some 10,000 to 12,000 pickers for more than 3 weeks, and threatened to spread north to impede harvesting of the State's entire crop.

In the course of the strike, the C.&A.W.I.U. encountered tactical problems which had not arisen in previous conflicts. Cotton, unlike the other crops, was not confined to a limited growing area. A successful strike required the interruption of operations on several thousand ranches covering a distance of more than a hundred miles over three counties.

Here the union utilized tactics that had been employed successfully a few weeks earlier in a similar strike of several thousand cotton pickers in Arizona. Mass picketing was relied upon to enlist the active participation of as many workers as possible, and in order to cover thoroughly the area affected, this was supplemented by guerilla picketing. Caravans of trucks and automobiles filled with striking families were organized at camps and union headquarters, and were dispatched every morning to districts where picking was reported to be going on.

The very scale on which the campaign was organized inevitably brought violence. Several riots, in some cases ending in the death of one or more participants, resulted from the attempts of the growers and

local authorities to disrupt the picketing. The strikers on several occasions were accused of illegal trespass and intimidation.⁸³

Most of the instances of forceful suppression of strikers' activities, however, took place at times when there was no evidence of property damage or violence on their part. The legality of picketing was subject to rather flexible interpretation by local law-enforcement authorities, particularly as regards the distinction between "peaceful persuasion" and "intimidation."

The response of growers and their sympathizers to the strike was immediate. Their first move proved to be a boomerang. As the walk-out spread from ranch to ranch, individual growers followed a policy of evicting all those who refused to work at the prevailing rate, hoping thus to eliminate "agitators" and deter other pickers from striking. The result was to drive thousands of evacuees into large "concentration camps," where they could be more easily mobilized and dominated by C.&A.W.I.U. organizers. Large emergency tent colonies, as in Corcoran, McFarland, Porterville, Tulare, and Wasco, served as homes for strikers, centers for mass meetings, and bases for guerilla picketing, thus facilitating the conduct of a strike involving pickers from more than a thousand scattered ranches.

The growers next organized protective associations, some public in character and some semisecret in the vigilante tradition. Members were allowed to arm themselves in defense of their property. In several communities prominent business organizations took the initiative. In Kern County, for instance, it was reported that—

*** As cotton picking throughout the county has been reported paralyzed to a great extent and there is no legal recourse for the growers of the county, citizens are banding together today, with assistance solicited from the Kern County Chamber of Commerce, the Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce, and the farm Bureau.

*** These organizations have been solicited by landowners and producers to join in this movement of a citizens' committee to prevent outside radicals and Communists from dominating and ruining a great industry.

*** Within 24 hours we will have a county-wide organization for the protection of growers and their families, as well as their property. These people have been threatened and are taking steps to protect themselves against potential hurt and damage. (Hearings, p. 19962.)

The tactics of such groups were designed to combat and neutralize those used by the strikers. Public mass meetings and parades of growers were held to counteract union-sponsored demonstrations, and when they failed, more violent methods were employed. Many ranchers armed with guns stood guard over their property to ward off pickets, and in several instances, as at Arvin, riots involving armed ranchers ended in fatal shooting of strikers. Other direct means utilized to break the strike included attempts to arrest and jail the strike leaders and to destroy the strikers' "concentration camps"; local authorities refused relief to strikers, hoping to starve them out, and intimidated them with threats of imprisonment in "bull pens." Still other means were efforts to deport aliens and to disrupt the strikers' ranks and secure their repudiation of Communist leadership. Later it was reported that the growers planned to import thousands of cotton pickers from Texas to break the strike.

⁸³Strikers were accused of having burned the cotton in some fields in Kern County (Bakersfield Californian, Oct. 4 and Oct. 7, 1933), of having attempted to burn some cotton at the Long gin near Corcoran, of resisting officers trying to arrest a Mexican in the Corcoran camp (Times-Delta, Oct. 19, 1933), of "night riding" (Times, Oct. 25, 1933), of overturning cotton wagons in fields of Kings County (Times-Delta, Oct. 23, 1933), and of firing shots into the home of a grower indicted for manslaughter in a riot in Pixley (San Francisco Chronicle, Oct. 20, 1933).

In several local communities, school children were recruited to work in the fields.

As a wedge between strike leaders and the rank and file, the growers endeavored to use the Mexican consul to persuade Mexican workers to organize into separate unions which could deal directly with growers rather than through C.&A.W.I.U.-controlled organizers. Active support was sought from local, State, and Federal administrative and law-enforcement officials as well as business and nonrural labor groups.

Local newspapers were vitriolic in their condemnation of the strike, blaming it almost entirely on outside "Reds" and "agitators." The Fresno Bee in an editorial of October 6 stated:

Our people are getting exceedingly weary of the activities of the professional Communist leaders mostly from New York, who are motivated by no honest desire to improve working conditions, but rather propose to feather their own nests while promoting the cause of social anarchy and red revolution. * * * They loaf between working seasons, and then descend on the scene like vultures who have smelled carrion from afar.

The Tulare Advance-Register, in its issue of October 16, declared:

The "strike" would vanish into thin air overnight if the outside agitators were rounded up en masse and escorted out of the country as they should be. And in the future we should guard against allowing them to get a new foothold for sowing the red seeds of radicalism among an otherwise happy and contented people.

Local forces of law and order tended to side with the growers. The latter were a long-established and well-organized group of residents who paid taxes and voted regularly. They constituted the main economic base of each community and wielded considerably more influence and pressure than the newly organized transient and nonvoting laborers, whose economic position was at best marginal. One undersheriff declared in an interview:

We protect our farmers here in Kern County. They are our best people. They are always with us. They keep the country going. They put us in here and they can put us out again, so we serve them. But the Mexicans are trash. They have no standard of living. We herd them like pigs. (Hearings, p. 1992.)

It was not surprising that the civil liberties of the strikers were violated on numerous occasions, as the Governor's Fact Finding Commission later revealed. Armed suppression and arrest were applied continually; the Western Worker of November 20 and the Hanford Journal of October 28 both reported a total of 113 arrests in four counties. In some localities the State highway patrol was dispatched to police the strike, thus relieving pressure on local deputies and shifting the cost from county to State. In the closing days of the strike there were rumors that the National Guard would be called out.

Strikers grew in number and remained cohesively organized under the C.&A.W.I.U. to the end, despite the extent and power of the opposition. Violence and the arrests of strike leaders only heightened the morale of the rank and file by convincing them of the essential sincerity of their "labor martyr" organizers. Strikers were further sustained by private and public relief in considerable quantity. The C.&A.W.I.U. through its Communist affiliations, particularly the Workers International Relief, raised substantial sums from sympathizers in various metropolitan communities. More important was the precedent-breaking action of the California Emergency Relief Administration. Probably for the first time in labor history in the United States, a public agency under

Federal direction provided public relief to workers actively involved in a large-scale strike.

Several efforts were made to settle the strike with the aid of outside mediating and arbitrating agencies. The first offer of mediation, from the Labor Commissioner of the State Department of Industrial Relations, was flatly rejected by the growers' representatives. Later attempts by Edward J. Fitzgerald, Conciliator of the U. S. Department of Labor, who had just completed the settlement of a similar cotton pickers' strike in Arizona, met with more response. In order to circumvent the growers' intransigent opposition to the Communist leadership, the Conciliator, in company with Mexican Consul E. Bravo, selected representative cotton pickers from each camp in the strike area to present their case before a fact-finding board appointed by the Governor of California.

The hearings made clear the contending groups' views on the wage issue. Growers justified their 60-cent rate on the ground that it was the highest for any cotton-picking area in the United States, outside of Arizona, and constituted a substantial increase over the 40-cent rate for 1932 and the 50-cent rate for 1931. The C.&A.W.I.U., claiming this to be inadequate compensation for the work, demanded a minimum scale of \$1 per hundredweight and recognition of the union as representative of agricultural workers in California.

The Governor's Committee, under the chairmanship of Dr. Ira B. Cross of the University of California, recommended a compromise settlement in its final report. It nevertheless implied a condemnation of the growers' tactics during the strike:

It is the judgment of the committee that upon evidence growers presented, growers can pay for picking at the rate of 75 cents per hundred pounds, and your committee begs leave therefore to advise that this rate of payment be established. Without question, civil rights of strikers have been violated. We appeal to constituted authorities to see that strikers are protected in rights conferred upon them by laws of the State and by Federal and State constitutions. (Hearings, p. 20002.)

Acceptance of the committee's recommended 75-cent rate was in effect made mandatory by various Federal and State agencies. The Federal Intermediate Credit Bank exerted pressure on growers to accept the terms.⁸⁴ Grower-employers met in a valley-wide conference in Fresno at the office of the Agricultural Labor Bureau of the San Joaquin Valley. After some opposition they voted to accept the 75-cent scale "in the interests of good American citizenship, law and order, and in order to forestall the spread of communism and radicalism and to protect the harvesting of other crops."⁸⁵ The union was prevailed upon to accept settlement on the same terms. Food relief was discontinued by the California State Emergency Relief Administration, and growers threatened to import new workers from other areas. The State highway patrol was dispatched to the main strike areas and threatened further arrests of strike leaders.

The aftereffects of the struggle were felt by both sides. Many active union members faced blacklists in local areas as a result of their activities, while in some localities growers who had violently opposed the strike had difficulty in recruiting pickers.

Despite the prestige it gained in leading the strike, the C.&A.W.I.U. failed to hold its position. Locals in such centers as Bakersfield, Shafter,

⁸⁴San Francisco Chronicle, October 25, 1933.

⁸⁵Times-Delta, October 25, 1933.

Wasco, Corcoran, Delano, McFarland, Pixley, Visalia, Dinuba, Hanford, Fresno, and Kingsbury declined in membership and influence soon after completion of the cotton harvest, when ex-strikers migrated to other sections of the State to work in various crops. By the end of the year only the Tulare headquarters of the union remained, and no more than a skeleton organization had survived.

Collateral Strikes

The strike wave organized by the C.&A.W.I.U. during 1933 and 1934 indirectly affected agricultural laborers in many nonunionized crop areas. Two hundred unorganized celery workers in the vicinity of Los Angeles won partial gains after a 1-month strike during May and June of 1933. Hop pickers in Sacramento County, variously estimated at 300 to 500, won wage increases after a 5-day strike during late August.⁸⁶ Certain racial groups also carried out spontaneous strikes as well as participating in the C.&A.W.I.U. and their own independent "ethnic" unions. In Santa Cruz 150 Filipino artichoke workers won a reduction in working hours at the same rates of pay after a 1-month walk-out during September and October of 1933.⁸⁷ Unorganized Mexican workers participated in small strikes of walnut pickers in Los Angeles,⁸⁸ and olive pickers in Tulare County.⁸⁹

The C.&A.W.I.U. in 1934⁹⁰

Until its demise in the summer of 1934, the C.&A.W.I.U. became much more restricted in the scope and intensity of its organizing activities. The movements which it led during the months following settlement of the cotton strike were indicative of its decline; they were fewer, smaller, and less successful than its previous attempts. Of the 15 strikes in agriculture and allied industries in California during 1934, 10 were led or at least strongly influenced by the C.&A.W.I.U.; most of these were small and of short duration.

The success of the union's campaign during 1933 had been due in large part to the advantage of novelty and surprise. For the first time in the history of American agriculture a well-financed and closely knit labor union used tactics which it had planned carefully and executed efficiently in organizing huge strikes of farm workers. The campaign was perfectly timed; the C.&A.W.I.U. was able to ride on the general upsurge of labor unionism unleashed in part by the NRA, at the very moment when labor unrest in agriculture was most widespread. Depressed farm laborers caught in a pincers of lagging wages and rising costs of living were easily led to participate in the excitement of a large and spectacular mass movement. The strikes led by the C.&A.W.I.U. caught growers unprepared at the height of the harvest season, when their position was most vulnerable.

The situation changed considerably during late 1933 and 1934. The growers recognized that inordinately low wage rates were a basic cause

⁸⁶Oakland Tribune, August 22, 1933; Western Worker, September 4, 1933. The California Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1933 reported two strikes in the hop industry, involving a total of 1,025 workers.

⁸⁷Oakland Tribune, September 9, 1933.

⁸⁸San Francisco Examiner, September 27, 1933.

⁸⁹Idem, November 24, 1933.

⁹⁰Except as otherwise noted, data in this section are based mainly on Hearings of the La Follette Committee, Parts 53-55.

of labor unrest and agitation, and they announced substantial increases in order to forestall further trouble. From the lowest standard of 15 cents per hour, established early in 1933, wage rates were raised by the summer of 1934 to a level of 20 cents to 25 cents per hour throughout the San Joaquin Valley.⁹¹ These improvements dampened the militancy of agricultural workers, for whom the novelty and glamor of strikes had worn thin under the stress of severe hardships. Improved relief facilities developed by Federal and State agencies during late 1933 and 1934 served further to allay labor unrest.

The C.&A.W.I.U., at its second district convention early in 1934, made strenuous efforts to revive and improve its flagging organization. Plans were laid to broaden and strengthen the membership. The union addressed itself to all workers on ranches, packing sheds, and canneries in California. Organizers were particularly anxious to reach workers in agricultural industries who belonged to local A.F. of L. affiliates and independent unions of Mexicans and Filipinos. The Young Communist League and youth sections of the C.&A.W.I.U. were directed to organize cannery workers in order to bring them into support of agricultural laborers. To combat vigilante opposition from farmers during strikes, the C.&A.W.I.U. laid greater stress on dividing the ranks of grower-employers; it hoped to make special agreements with small farmers to induce them to withdraw their support from larger growers.⁹²

Particular stress was laid also upon proper organization and preliminary planning of strikes. The union laid its defeats to its assuming the leadership of spontaneous strikes which had broken out prematurely. A major weakness of the C.&A.W.I.U. lay in the inadequate contact of the Communist Party leadership with large sections of the agricultural labor population. A report at the second convention stated:

Probably the outstanding shortcoming of the leadership of the 1933 struggles was that too large a part of the leadership consisted of comrades who were not native to the situation that existed, and did not know the territorial conditions of the industry, or the relation of the contending forces. (Hearings, Part 54, p. 20028.)

To rectify these shortcomings, the C.&A.W.I.U. executive council planned in the future to allow nonparty workers a larger share in the direction of union-organized strikes. A resolution at the convention stated that—

In organizing our leading committees in such a situation, we must be extremely careful to bring the rank and file into the leadership, and especially to bring them into those posts which are decisive for making decisions as to the course of their strike. (Hearings, Part 54, p. 20030.)

Several other resolutions were passed to improve the effectiveness of union tactics in strike situations. Strike committees, for instance, were to be democratically elected and "representative of every race and color, of every ranch, shed and cannery involved in the strike."

The union's organizational efforts were in large part neutralized by the temporary apathy of agricultural workers and, more important, by organized grower-employers' elaborate preparations to suppress any recurrences of labor trouble. The San Joaquin Valley cotton-pickers' strike had aroused apprehension among growers in other crop areas in California. Protective associations were organized in many localities to combat the "Communist menace," and early in 1934 these were federated into

⁹¹Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 49 (p. 18148).

⁹²See Appendix F, Organizing Tactics of the C.&A.W.I.U. (p. 429).

a powerful State-wide organization known as the Associated Farmers of California, Inc. It launched an aggressive campaign against farm-labor unionism and finally succeeded in having the more active left-wing organizers arrested and sentenced to several years' imprisonment.

Imperial Valley Strikes, November 1933–March 1934

The C.&A.W.I.U. suffered its first serious setback in several months when it attempted, early in 1934, to organize field workers in the Imperial Valley for a large strike in the spring melon harvest. In this area, which had long been a "trouble spot" in California, labor-employer conflict had developed as a concomitant of the extraordinarily large-scale and commercialized nature of the farm operations. As portrayed in an official report by the Phillips Committee, representing the California State Chamber of Commerce and the State Board of Agriculture—

* * * The major part of the total vegetable production of lettuce, canteloups, carrots, etc., is contributed by the large-scale corporate type of farming and but a minor part by operators who own or lease the holdings that they farm. The major portion of the pea and tomato output, however, appears to be produced on the smaller farms. In general, the corporate type of farming is of greatest importance from the standpoint of acreages farmed and value of output.

This difference in the prevailing types of agriculture creates dissimilar problems. Operators of relatively small farms do not appear to have problems that are identical with those of the so-called "grower-shippers." The latter group, because of its influence, largely determines the course of action pursued by the smaller growers. The problems, therefore, tend to be those incident to the concentration of an industry in relatively few hands, working with the better class of lands, operating on a relatively large scale, leasing much of the land that is thus farmed, planned, and directed by nonresident managers, financed with considerable borrowed capital, conducted with paid resident farm managers, superintendents, and farm hands. The goal is one of profit making, accompanied by a lack of permanency inherent in a combination of leased lands and salaried positions. The growing of vegetable crops, therefore, is largely of a speculative nature (in so far as marketing is concerned) and every effort is directed to producing crops as economically as possible and marketing them to the best of the operators' abilities in order to produce as wide a margin of profit as may be possible. (Hearings, Part 55, p. 20135.)

The precarious economic situation in the valley also contributed to its explosive labor relations and the proclivity of local residents for adopting extra-legal violence and vigilantism. This condition was portrayed in a report by Gen. Pelham Glassford, a special mediator appointed by the Federal Government early in 1934:

It is a 1-industry community. Unless these valuable crops are harvested, rents are not paid, merchandising bills are not paid, professional services are not remunerated, taxes are not paid; in other words, the whole economy of the population depends upon the successful harvesting of these valuable crops.

It, therefore, can be quite well understood that all engaged in business are going to support the shippers and growers against militancy in labor and, furthermore, that they are going to control the politics of the Imperial Valley and elect officials who will carry on their desires in matters that are essential for the economic welfare of the valley. Particularly characteristic of Imperial Valley is the fact that it is isolated, bounded on the east and west by large expanses of sand; on the north by the Salton Sea, and on the south by Mexico. (Hearings, Part 55, p. 20150.)

Field workers' strikes had first occurred in the valley in 1928 and again in 1930, the latter being the C.&A.W.I.U.'s baptism of fire. Unionism in both instances had been crushed temporarily through arrests and suppression of civil liberties. Labor conditions had deteriorated considerably during the following 3 years. Though the labor-contractor

problem was far less serious than it had been earlier, chronic unemployment and labor surpluses had led to a continuous decline in wages. By the spring of 1933 the wage level was $16\frac{2}{3}$ cents per hour for irrigators and 15 cents per hour for other field workers, as compared to levels of 35 to 50 cents per hour in 1929 and 1930.⁹³ An absence of standardization in wage levels and noticeable differences in wage rates paid by different growers were a further source of irritation to the workers.

The wave of farm strikes during late summer and fall prompted the growers in the Imperial Valley to adopt a more conciliatory attitude. In order to forestall an impending invasion of the valley by the C.&A.W.I.U., they took steps to negotiate with their employees and grant certain concessions.

Early in October 1933, the Union of Mexican Field Workers was revived in the valley under the encouragement of the Mexican consul, and on November 1 a committee of the union met with representatives of the growers. The latter agreed, among other things, to pay $22\frac{1}{2}$ cents per hour for harvesting lettuce and to provide a minimum of 5 hours' work for any laborer taken to the field.

Some 2 weeks later, alleging that the growers were not living up to their agreement, the Mexican union called a 1-day strike on November 17, 1933. With the Mexican consul at Calexico acting as intermediary, representatives of the two groups met again in December to consider the union charges. During the last few weeks of December, however, the C.&A.W.I.U. entered the valley and began to organize a local. The union recruited new members rapidly and was reported to have won control temporarily over the members of the Mexican union.⁹⁴ Consequently, at the next meeting between worker and grower representatives labor spokesmen, under the domination of the C.&A.W.I.U., demanded wages of 35 cents per hour. When the growers flatly rejected this demand the union called a strike.

The provocative tactics of the union stimulated correspondingly violent suppression from growers and local authorities.⁹⁵ A caravan of union members from Brawley, formed to attend a meeting in El Centro, was dispersed by police and citizen volunteers using tear gas. A union meeting in Brawley also was broken up when local police and State highway patrolmen, together with local armed citizens, entered the meeting hall and threw tear-gas bombs. Local vigilantes kidnapped and assaulted several labor attorneys and "outside" spectators. In one 2-week period in the middle of January, 86 arrests were made.

The Imperial Valley during 1934 became one of the most highly publicized localities in the country for its suppression of civil liberties. General Glassford stated in a report to the Board of Supervisors of Imperial Valley:

⁹³Wages paid on an hourly basis to field workers remained fairly constant throughout the valley during 1929, 1930, and the spring and summer months of 1931, but in August a downward trend began. A reduction in the prevailing scale of wages was again recorded in April, August, and November 1932, and in April 1933. The period from April to June 1933 registered the lowest scale (16 $\frac{2}{3}$ cents per hour for irrigators and 15 cents for other workers as contrasted with 35 cents and 50 cents in 1929 and 1930). Beginning in July 1933, the wage scale started to rise, with increases taking place in July and November 1933. (Hearings, Part 55, p. 19482.)

⁹⁴The officers of the Mexican union, unsuccessful in obtaining satisfactory recognition for their organization, were reported to have turned it over to the C.&A.W.I.U. (Hearings, Part 55, p. 20140; see also Report to National Labor Board by Lubin Committee.)

⁹⁵General Glassford, Special Conciliator of the U. S. Department of Labor, claimed that representatives of the C.&A.W.I.U. attempted to make the Imperial Valley a "laboratory" or proving ground for class struggle and revolutionary theories. (Hearings, Part 55, p. 20150.)

* * * After more than 2 months of observation and investigation in Imperial Valley, it is my conviction that a group of growers have exploited a "communist" hysteria for the advancement of their own interests; that they have welcomed labor agitation, which they could brand as "Red," as a means of sustaining supremacy by mob rule, thereby preserving what is so essential to their profits, cheap labor; that they have succeeded in drawing into their conspiracy certain county officials who have become the principal tools of their machine. (Hearings, Part 55, p. 20148.)

A report to the National Labor Board by a special commission made up of J. L. Leonard, W. J. French, and Simon J. Lubin seemed to concur in this view:

* * * We uncovered sufficient evidence to convince us that in more than one instance the law was trampled underfoot by representative citizens of Imperial County and by public officials under oath to support the law. (Hearings, Part 55, p. 20142.)

Their views, however, were severely criticized in a Report on The Imperial Valley Farm Labor Situation by a special investigating committee composed of C. B. Hutchinson, Dean of the College of Agriculture, University of California, W. C. Jacobsen of the State Department of Agriculture, and John Phillips of the State Assembly, now a member of Congress. This group had been appointed at the request of the California State Board of Agriculture, the California Farm Bureau Federation, and the agricultural department of the California State Chamber of Commerce. Its report published on April 20, 1934, stressed the provocative nature of the Communist labor organizers' activities, and their potential danger to the harvesting of the specialized, highly perishable crops on which the residents of the valley depended. The committee asserted furthermore that "technically there is no strike in the Imperial Valley, nor any imminent."⁹⁶ It claimed that there were uninterrupted shipments of lettuce and that growers had a working agreement with a revived Mexican union having some 1,800 members. As there was no strike, the committee decided, there could be no official mediation and no intervention by the State or Federal authorities.

The growers were successful in preventing the effective organization of field workers by the C.&A.W.I.U. and thus counteracted the attempted strike. The separate Mexican union was organized under the direction of Consul Joaquin Terraza, and was named the Asociación Mexicana del Valle Imperial. It negotiated an agreement with the growers, and in time won enough workers from the C.&A.W.I.U. to render the latter's strike ineffective. General Glassford considered the Asociación a company union because it was encouraged by growers, who refused jobs to anyone but its members.

The C.&A.W.I.U. persisted without success in its efforts to organize the field workers in the valley in preparation for a strike in the cantaloup harvest during the spring. It could claim only a few limited successes in small 1-ranch strikes.

The only large strike led by the C.&A.W.I.U. in Imperial County was one in February involving some 3,500 to 4,000 pea pickers in the vicinity of Calipatria, at the northern end of the valley. A strike bulletin issued by the union at the time announced that "10,000 American, Mexican, Filipino, and Puerto Rican workers are on strike in the Calipatria pea field area, demanding 2 cents per pound, recognition of the C. & A.W.I.U., clean water on the job, sanitary conditions, scales for every

⁹⁶Report on The Imperial Valley Farm Labor Situation, by a Special Investigating Committee, San Francisco, April 20, 1934 (p. 24).

150 workers, release of all arrested strikers." The union claimed that considerable "police and vigilante terror" had been employed against its members. Several strikers were reported as having been arrested on charges of carrying firearms. The Calipatria Herald, in its issue of February 10, 1934, had reported that the influx of a surplus of pickers had created a chronic problem of local relief, and Federal aid was sought. During the strike several camps were closed by county health authorities because of outbreaks of "pink eye," measles, and typhoid.

The strike was settled through the mediation of State government representatives. After a conference, the growers agreed to accept arbitration through a committee composed of four growers and two representatives each from the Mexican and white strikers. Thomas Barker, State Commissioner of Industrial Relations, acted as chairman.⁹⁷

Miscellaneous Strikes: February-April 1934

While the Imperial Valley struggles were at their height, the C.& A.W.I.U., in cooperation with independent unions, made scattered forays over numerous crop areas of California. Several hundred citrus-fruit pickers and packing-shed workers in Los Angeles County struck early in January for wage increases and union recognition. Members of the Confederación de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos (C.U.C.O.M.) voted a united-front policy of cooperation with the C.& A.W.I.U. Strike organizers reported that a small A.F. of L. local, though refusing to join forces with the first two unions, nevertheless refused to "scab."⁹⁸

Several hundred Filipino vegetable workers in the vicinity of Pescadero (San Mateo County) were organized by the C.&A.W.I.U. in January, and struck for union recognition and a wage increase of 5 cents per hour, to a 25-cent scale. The growers imported Japanese strike-breakers, and the sheriff warned strikers to leave the county or face arrest. Several hundred pickets remained, nevertheless, and a compromise settlement was reached.⁹⁹ According to the Agricultural Worker of February 20, 1934, the strike raised wages from 20 cents to 22½ cents per hour and won recognition for the C.&A.W.I.U. A union contract was signed with several growers.

The C.&A.W.I.U. failed early in February to gain control of one small strike of agricultural workers belonging to a local Socialist-controlled "NRA Union." Communist spokesmen charged that the strikers were "sold out" through a premature settlement brought about with the help of Labor Commissioner Crook and Administrator George Creel.⁹⁸ C.&A.W.I.U. organizers during March also failed to carry out a threatened strike of citrus workers in the Fresno area.¹

A large spontaneous walk-out of potato cutters near Arvin (Kern County) was narrowly averted during February 1934. Halfway through

⁹⁷San Francisco Chronicle, February 19, 1934.

⁹⁸The Agricultural Worker (published by C.&A.W.I.U., San Jose, Calif.), February 20, 1934.

⁹⁹San Francisco Examiner, January 24 and 25, 1934; Los Angeles Times, January 25, 1934.

¹San Francisco Examiner, March 7, 1934.

the harvest, the cutters won a pay increase of 1 cent per bag by threatening to strike. Several walked out a few days later to demand that the pay increase be made retroactive. The strike was soon broken by the importation of new workers guarded by special deputies.²

Following the Imperial Valley debacle, the C.&A.W.I.U. shifted its activities farther north, in the Salinas and Sacramento Valleys. A few dozen Filipino asparagus cutters organized by the union on a ranch in Sacramento County won a small strike during March. The grower-employer in this instance was paying wages below standard for the area. Neighboring growers exerted pressure on him to pay the accepted rates, in order to settle the strike and forestall further agitation. The asparagus area was described as being "on edge," as C.&A.W.I.U. organizers were active among the 7,000 Filipino workers employed in the crop.³

A large strike under C.&A.W.I.U. leadership broke out in Sacramento County during April. Early in the month some 500 to 800 Mexican and Filipino strawberry pickers in the Florin district refused to begin picking until rates were raised from 20 to 25 cents per hour. There was one instance of violence, when local authorities used tear gas against strikers who were reported to have attacked workers in the fields. One organizer was arrested on the charge of stabbing two ranchers.⁴

The strike ended with a partial victory for the union. Before the strike was a week old, several growers had signed the union agreement, granting 25 cents per hour, union recognition, and other conditions.⁵ A C&A.W.I.U. bulletin for April 17, 1934, claimed that 75 percent of the growers finally signed the agreement. Almost all the growers, most of whom were Japanese, were paying a rate of at least 22½ cents per hour when the strike was settled.

The C.&A.W.I.U.'s first attempt in several years to organize a processing industry was unsuccessful. In April 45 mushroom workers in the Golden State Mushroom Co.'s plant in Redwood City struck for a minimum scale of \$15 per week, an 8-hour day, and abolition of discriminatory hiring and firing. The walk-out was broken, union spokesmen claimed, when the chamber of commerce and local welfare agencies sent in unemployed as "scabs."⁶

The C.&A.W.I.U. made some gains in other scattered strikes. A walk-out of about a hundred pea pickers in Alameda County won a few limited concessions early in April. Later in the month a larger C.&A.W.I.U.-organized strike of 2,000 to 3,000 in Monterey County was settled with compromise gains to the workers.⁷ This walk-out was organized in the familiar pattern; before the strike about 100 camp delegates, representing an estimated 3,000 pickers, convened and formulated demands for 35 cents per hour, union recognition, and abolition of contractors.⁸ A strike of approximately 1,000 pickers in San Mateo County during May likewise won a compromise wage increase of 2 cents per hamper.⁹

²Los Angeles Times, February 8, 1934.

³San Francisco Examiner, March 15, 1934.

⁴Idem, April 9 and 11, 1934.

⁵See Appendix G: Sample Agreement between Strawberry Growers and Pickers, Sacramento County, April 1934 (p. 430).

⁶C.&A.W.I.U. Bulletin (San Jose), April 17, 1934.

⁷Western Worker, April 23, April 30, 1934.

⁸Agricultural Worker, April 17, 1934.

⁹San Francisco Examiner, May 22, 1934.

Apricot Pickers' Strike, Contra Costa County, June 1934

The end of the C.&A.W.I.U. as an effective labor union in California agriculture was signified in June 1934, when it suffered a serious defeat in a strike of apricot pickers in Contra Costa County.

Structurally the apricot crop in the Brentwood district seemed vulnerable to strike action. It was highly centralized and dominated by three large grower-shipper enterprises, the Balfour-Guthrie Co., the H. P. Garin Co., and the D. D. Wilson Co. The rest of the district was occupied by individual growers operating ranches of 15 to 21 acres and larger.

While the crops controlled by the three dominant companies were harvested largely by migratory Filipino and Mexican labor, this was not true of the smaller individual ranches. The latter frequently sold their fruit "on the trees" to the large shipping company, which usually brought in its own crew of pickers and cutters at harvest time. The individual grower who harvested his own crop, however, employed mostly local labor. In the cutting sheds of the large companies as well as of the small farmers, the work was performed almost entirely by local women and girls.

Local resident workers presented no particular housing problem, but the available facilities for handling the large seasonal influx of migratory workers were inadequate. A survey by a committee of ministers from churches in nearby towns expressed the opinion that "the problem of migratory labor with an influx of three times as many workers as can find employment produced an acute situation."¹⁰ Unrest and discontent generated by the unsatisfactory living conditions of these surplus workers were fuel for agitators of the C.&A.W.I.U.

Strike meetings were held by the C.&A.W.I.U. organizers, as migratory pickers arrived in motor caravans. Demands were made for an hourly rate of 35 cents instead of the prevailing 20 cents, or piece rates of 15 cents per box for cutters instead of the prevailing 8 cents; an 8-hour day; and union recognition. By June 11 the union claimed that about 1,000 workers were on strike, and picket lines were established around the largest ranches.¹¹

Local growers and businessmen at a meeting in Brentwood appealed to county sheriff R. R. Veale for protection against the activities of transients. The sheriff issued orders forbidding picketing in the Brentwood area, and about 75 persons were deputized specifically to carry out these instructions. Assisted by State highway patrolmen, they broke up one strike caravan. One hundred and fifty pickets were led to a corral in the railroad yards, where they were fed, and later were conducted to the San Joaquin County line. Thirteen ringleaders were arrested on charges of violating Section 416 of the Penal Code, which prohibited disturbances on public highways. The Oakland Tribune described this action of the authorities as a "round-up and deportation of undesirable agitators."¹² The San Francisco Labor Council, however, condemned the action as "outrages by mobs of farmers aided and abetted by State highway police."¹³

¹⁰Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 49 (p. 18157).

¹¹Western Worker, June 11, 1934.

¹²Oakland Tribune, June 5, 1934.

¹³Labor Clarion (San Francisco), June 15, 1934.

At this point a newly organized local of the A.F. of L. entered the strike in competition with the C.&A.W.I.U. This organization, Cannery Workers Union No. 18893, finally gained control.¹⁴

A strike committee of 5 members from both unions was established, including Caroline Decker (district secretary of the C.&A.W.I.U.), W. H. Urmy, a deputy labor commissioner, presented its demands at a meeting of large growers, which rejected them on the ground that the committee was composed of outsiders who did not represent the mass of pickers.¹⁵

The strike was finally ended by the last week in June. A few growers and contractors acceded to the union demands for increased wage rates and an 8-hour day, but the larger companies continued to pay the same wages under the same working conditions as before.¹⁶

Apricot Strike at Hayward, June 1934

The last strike led by the C.&A.W.I.U. was significant in terms of its implications rather than its accomplishments. It was one of the few instances in American labor history in which organized agricultural workers carried out a sympathetic strike to support an urban labor movement. Four hundred apricot pickers near Hayward (Alameda County) struck for wage increases early in July 1934. They demanded also that troops be removed from the San Francisco waterfront, where the great maritime strike of 1934 currently was raging.¹⁷

Death of the C.&A.W.I.U.

The C.&A.W.I.U. became inactive soon after the Hayward strike, and finally died. Some "labor trouble" was reported late in July 1934, in San Joaquin Valley vineyards, where C.&A.W.I.U. organizers were active among workers harvesting the grape crop. Growers organized in vigilante associations had made extensive preparations beforehand to combat the union, and the threatened strike failed to materialize.¹⁸

The Associated Farmers and allied urban commercial and industrial interests struck directly at the C.&A.W.I.U. to forestall further unionization. The highly publicized general strike of San Francisco during the summer of 1934 had generated a strong antiradical reaction throughout California, and a round-up of the more active Communist organizers resulted. Acting partly under the pressure of agricultural interests, police raided C.&A.W.I.U. headquarters in Sacramento and arrested 17 leaders on charges of criminal syndicalism. Several of these, including such leading district organizers as Pat Chambers and Caroline Decker, were sentenced in 1935 to several years' imprisonment.

¹⁴In an unpublished report of May 28, 1935, J. B. Nathan, business agent of Local 18893, claimed that an almost unanimous vote endorsing the leadership of the A.F. of L. was polled at a meeting of about 2,000 workers. A strike committee was given authority to sign contracts in the name of the Cannery Workers Union with every grower or contractor willing to meet union conditions. Within half an hour, according to Nathan, agreements were signed with 6 growers employing over 300 workers.

¹⁵Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 49 (p. 18155); and *Contra Costa Gazette*, June 9, 1933.

¹⁶Claims by spokesmen of the C.&A.W.I.U. (as represented by the *Western Worker* in its issue of June 25, 1934), that control by the A.F. of L. local resulted in a decrease of wages from 20 cents per hour to 15 cents after the strike was lost, were not substantiated.

¹⁷*Western Worker*, July 15, 1934.

¹⁸*Bakersfield Californian*, July 16 and 17, 1934.

The formal termination of the C.&A.W.I.U. came on March 17, 1935, when its parent body, the Trade Union Unity League, and all affiliated organizations were dissolved in accordance with a general change in the party line. At that time the Communist Party officially adopted a policy which it had in fact been following for several months: Communist labor-union organizers and affiliated bodies were to merge with or enter independent labor organizations and unions in the A.F. of L.¹⁹

The C.&A.W.I.U. in Perspective

The C.&A.W.I.U. during its brief span of less than 4 years, led dozens of strikes, large and small. Some were spectacular successes, others were dismal failures. Though in the end the union was crushed, its campaign was not without lasting effects. Wages were raised in all major growing areas of the State as a result of the upsurge in 1933, and they have never since then fallen to the low levels of late 1932. Perhaps more important, the C.&A.W.I.U.'s organized agitation served to attract sympathetic public attention to some of the more pressing problems of agricultural labor in California. State and Federal Government agencies in time undertook various measures to ameliorate some of the worst hardships suffered by farm workers in that State.

As a collective-bargaining organization, the C.&A.W.I.U. followed a policy that was in some respects self-defeating. It was a revolutionary or "fighting" union, in contrast to the conciliatory "business" unions which it opposed, and its tactics were aggressive and provocative. Its strike campaigns aroused a latent mob spirit in many communities. Because its organizers injected revolutionary doctrines into wage disputes, the employers were able to enlist support from many groups on other grounds than those of mere economic interest. The announced objectives of most vigilante organizations formed to "drive out the Reds" had much moral and patriotic appeal in conservative rural areas. When an anti-union movement was mobilized and coordinated on a State-wide scale by a well-financed body such as the Associated Farmers of California, it proved to be more than a match for any organization of farm laborers.

The C.&A.W.I.U.'s strength and effectiveness rested on wide rank and file support, won by low initiation fees and monthly dues, and by apparently democratic participation in union affairs. This support it utilized to organize and direct general strikes designed to involve all workers employed in each intensive crop area. The union was sometimes disinclined to accept separate agreements with individual growers willing to meet its demands; on several occasions strikers refused to return to work until *all* grower-employers had accepted the union's terms.

Its bargaining policy proved to be a boomerang, as it solidified the anti-union sentiments and interests of growers. The union sought to win its demands in toto by continuing and expanding strikes, rather than by submitting to mediation which would bring settlement through compromise. The growers, consequently, were likely to regard a strike situation as one of "rule or ruin," and often were intransigent in their refusal to meet with representatives of strikers or to listen to their grievances. As a result of the attitudes of the two contending groups, impasses frequently occurred.

¹⁹Labor Fact Book, Vol. III, p. 101 (New York, Labor Research Association, 1936).

The inner contradiction of Communist unionism was nowhere more apparent than in the struggles of the C.&A.W.I.U. in rural California. Its ultimate revolutionary objectives were in many ways incompatible with the immediate need for seeking improvements in wages and working conditions in order to retain the support of its members. The San Joaquin Valley cotton strike of 1933 was the best organized and the most successful of any large-scale walk-outs led by the C.&A.W.I.U. or any other union in agriculture. Party members, however, were severely criticized in the official organ, the *Western Worker*, for not infusing more propaganda into union meetings, and for being too greatly concerned with the immediate problems of the strike. On the other hand, when political objectives were made paramount, the rank and file lost interest, and many joined the more opportunistic and conciliatory affiliates of the American Federation of Labor and independent racial unions.

Overcentralization of union control and direction also proved a major weakness of the C.&A.W.I.U. Though minor officers and organizers were often drawn from the rank and file, the main leaders in each strike were usually the same—chiefly a few able organizers who were gifted as orators and thoroughly imbued with revolutionary spirit. This very continuity of leadership was fatal; it was seized upon by the Associated Farmers and others as in itself proof that agricultural strikes were all part of a concerted attempt to overthrow the Government. When the leaders were arrested and convicted under the criminal syndicalism laws of the State, the union organization collapsed.

CHAPTER IX.—Spontaneous Strikes and Independent Unions

Labor-employer conflict in California farming decreased in scope and intensity after the death of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union. The Communist Party's State organization for agricultural workers was temporarily disrupted, and the most able and active leaders were imprisoned. For some time after the summer of 1934 the major efforts of left-wing unionists were drawn away from agriculture and focused on key urban centers. Industrial labor organizations, particularly the powerful maritime unions, had gained substantial momentum following the general strike in San Francisco.

Meanwhile the agricultural labor movement in California was relatively dormant. Farm workers' unions were decentralized, and collective action was intermittent and local. In the absence of an adequate State-wide union structure, Communist labor organizers followed a "knight errant" policy somewhat reminiscent of the Industrial Workers of the World. Agricultural workers were reached primarily through unemployed councils and independently organized unions in a few rural areas. Itinerant party members organized scattered locals where the labor outlook was promising and sought to gain control of unions already established by the American Federation of Labor and other bodies. Among the most effective field workers' organizations that appeared, in the years before the California Federation of Labor began a State-wide campaign, were the separate unions of Mexicans and Filipinos. On several occasions these were torn by internal dissension between radical and conservative elements struggling for control.

Labor organizers, both right and left wing, began to lay greater emphasis on establishing stable local unions in agriculture and allied industries than on agitating and leading strikes. No major farm walk-outs were called officially by Communist Party affiliates after those in the apricot orchards of Contra Costa and Alameda Counties in July 1934. The most important strikes during late 1934 and 1935 were spontaneous or nonunionized outbreaks, although they were undoubtedly influenced and stimulated indirectly by the militant campaign which the C.&A.W.I.U. had carried out in previous years. Some spontaneous strikes later came under the control of Communist organizers, and others were taken over by members of the A.F. of L. or independent unions.

Spontaneous Strikes

Historically, spontaneous strikes had preceded the formation of labor unions in agriculture. They usually indicated an amorphous dissatisfaction which unions periodically could focus on specific issues. However, the trend in extent and intensity of spontaneous strikes among farm workers reflected, by and large, the changing fortunes of farm-labor unionism. At least four such outbreaks, ranging in size from a few dozen to a few hundred workers, had occurred during the first years of depression, from 1930 through 1932. During 1933 and 1934, under the indirect stimulus of

the C.&A.W.I.U.'s widespread and militant campaign,¹ they had increased in number to eight, most of which involved several hundred participants.

Spontaneous or nonunion strikes in California continued to grow in scope and frequency in succeeding years. They constituted a large proportion of all farm-labor outbreaks in 1935, chiefly because the collapse of the C.&A.W.I.U. had left workers without a large organization to represent them for collective bargaining; hence, they had to rely mainly on unplanned local action. As has already been seen (table 3, chapter V), farm strikes in California decreased considerably in size and number during 1935, then more than doubled in both respects during 1936.

Relief Policy and Farm-Labor Strikes

The prevalence of spontaneous as well as union-organized farm-labor strikes during the mid-thirties and later was due in large part to a glutted labor market and to the problems which this raised for public relief agencies. Mexicans had constituted the main postwar labor supply for California's agriculture. In off-season months they had regularly contributed a disproportionate number of public welfare cases in large cities such as Los Angeles. Although many were deported or repatriated to Mexico during the early depression years, those remaining, including the naturalized, were sufficient to meet the reduced needs of California farms.

Growers began to complain of labor shortages during 1935, when the Federal Government was establishing systematic relief measures for the unemployed. Relief income gave agricultural workers an increased bargaining power, because some were no longer forced to work at sub-standard wages. Spokesmen of the employers claimed that the labor shortage became acute when the Works Progress Administration was established by the Federal Government in 1935. "With hundreds of thousands of people on the relief rolls of California," wrote Dr. G. P. Clements, manager of the agricultural department of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, "California in 1935 has experienced the most disastrous labor famine in her history."²

The alleged shortage was rapidly being filled through a large and growing influx of "Dust Bowl refugees" from the Middle West and Southwest, which reached flood proportions in 1937 and 1938. This huge migration had the effect of reducing average earnings for farm work, even at higher wage rates. The average duration of seasonal jobs was reduced, the mobility of those forced to rely on farm work was increased, and friction of a type leading to strikes became widespread.

These fundamental changes in the labor supply for California's agriculture caused much concern among grower-employers. Dr. Clements expressed their alarm as follows:

This year 90 percent of the labor consisted of migratory labor from the South, mid-South, and Southeast. This labor, mostly white, is supposed to supplant the former Mexican laborers who were what might be termed versatile labor, since when the 150 days of agricultural labor were over they could turn their hands to the manual labor of rough industry and public utility and tighten their belts and exist on the minimum of subsistence. Another feature in their favor was that they

¹See preceding chapter.

²Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 53 (p. 19674).

were adaptable labor in the agricultural field. They were impossible of unionizing; they were tractable labor. Can we expect these new white transient citizens to fill their place?

The white transients are not tractable labor. Being American citizens, they are going to demand the so-called American standards of living. In our own estimation they are going to be the finest pabulum for unionization for either group—the A.F. of L. or the subversive elements. They are not going to be satisfied with 160 working days. If our government, whether county, State or Federal, takes care of them, at the end of the year they become California citizens and a part of our economy or lack of economy. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 53, p. 19467.)

Agricultural workers who were residents of California came to rely in growing numbers upon WPA work relief and cash disbursements from the State Relief Administration. Many migrated less, as relief grants freed them from the ceaseless pursuit of brief jobs on farms. They could reside in one locality the year round, and need perform agricultural labor only for a few weeks during the harvest season. Work on Federal projects usually paid 50 cents or more per hour, and work or cash relief totaled sometimes \$40 or \$50 or more per month. For many families it became as important a source of livelihood as farm work and was often more attractive.

The effect on agricultural labor was twofold. Relief payments were often higher than earnings in agriculture, leading the farm laborers to agitate more strenuously for higher pay for farm work. They took steps at the same time to protect their status as relief clients, since relief checks were often more important than intermittent farm wages in providing a subsistence. Unions of relief clients and unemployed consequently grew in number and size during the mid-thirties. On some occasions they took the initiative in organizing field laborers and leading local strikes during 1935 and 1936. In rural areas, however, they were largely occupied with counteracting the efforts of organized growers who were endeavoring to close relief projects and displace the clients in order to increase the available farm-labor supply. Dr. G. P. Clements sounded a warning at the time:

The Mexican on relief is being unionized and is being used to foment strikes among the few still loyal Mexican workers. The Mexican casual labor is lost to the California farmer unless immediate action is taken to get him off relief. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 53, p. 19675.)

The Associated Farmers and other agricultural employers' associations, supported by certain prominent newspapers, exerted increasing pressure on relief administrators during 1935 and 1936 to release clients for farm work. The Western Grower-Shipper stated categorically that "all unskilled labor capable of working in agricultural districts must be released from WPA."³ The Associated Farmers condemned the granting of relief to strikers, on the ground that it forced the public to subsidize strikes and thus to finance Communist unions of agricultural and relief workers.³ Farm-union spokesmen charged that grower-shipper interests were "using the relief administration as a club to beat down wages," and that relief clients were being dropped from the rolls and forced to work at 20 cents per hour.⁴

Far from weakening unionism, the organized growers' campaign stimulated the farm workers and unemployed to organize more strongly

³From *Apathy to Action* (organ of the Associated Farmers of California, San Francisco), No. 30, November 23, 1936 (p. 2).

⁴*Rural Worker*, Vol. I, No. 14, September 1936 (p. 4).

for their own protection. A number of relief organizations had been established in the early thirties as "unemployed councils." After 1934, as already noted, organizers from the C.&A.W.I.U. and other Communist affiliates reverted to the "boring from within" policy and worked in collaboration with other groups to form numerous public-works and unemployed unions. These and similar bodies in California and other States were next merged and federated on a national scale in the Workers Alliance of America. Left-wing elements acting through this organization were able to agitate effectively for closer unity among unemployed and seasonally employed field and processing workers to resist attempts to cut them off from relief. Affiliation with the A.F. of L. now had greater appeal, as it held out the prospect of support from well-organized and politically weighty State and county union affiliates of the State federation of labor. The Workers Alliance, with its central headquarters in Washington, D.C., achieved a status recognized by the Federal Government. It attempted to dovetail its program for the unemployed with the organizing policies of the A.F. of L. and the Committee for Industrial Organization. In each agricultural area the Alliance drew up agreements for a regular interchange of workers with other unions. It was to release members when they were employed seasonally on farms and reinstate them when their work was finished.

It was suspected that certain spontaneous walk-outs, as well as some led by local unions of unemployed and others during 1935, had been organized by former C.&A.W.I.U. organizers hiding their Communist affiliations under the new united-front policy. Such were the strikes of milkers in Los Angeles County during April, of 50 farm workers in Butte County during May, of several hundred potato diggers belonging to a local vegetable workers' union in Santa Barbara, during August, and of apple pickers in Sonoma County during the same month.⁵ No Communist control, however, was imputed to a minor strike of grape pickers in Kern County during September, in the course of which several arrests were made,⁶ nor to a strike of cotton pickers in the San Joaquin Valley during September and October.⁷

Sonoma Apple Pickers' Strike, August 1935

The most highly publicized strike of agricultural workers during 1935 involved some 2,000 apple pickers in the vicinity of Santa Rosa (Sonoma County). It began as a spontaneous movement and later came under the domination of radical organizers who were active in the local public-works and unemployed union.

Late in July some 1,200 workers in the apple crop held a preharvest mass meeting in Santa Rosa and voted unanimously to strike in order to raise wages to 25 cents per hour, as compared to the prevailing level of 20 cents.⁸ Since the season was delayed, the growers were able to ignore the strike vote until 200 packing-house employees joined the field workers. Definite steps were then taken to suppress the movement. Early in August, 250 growers and sympathizers made a vigilante raid and broke up a meeting addressed by alleged Communist Party members.⁹ Pressure

⁵Pacific Rural Press, September 12, 1936.

⁶Oakland Tribune, September 8, 1935.

⁷Western Worker, December 28, 1935.

⁸Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 2, September 1935.

was exerted on relief authorities to release clients for farm work, as the crop was ripening and the labor shortage created by the strike was becoming critical. A vigilante group, including some prominent local businessmen and civic leaders, finally resorted to direct violence late in August. A mob of several hundred men was reported to have tarred and feathered, and severely beaten two alleged Communist organizers and to have driven them out of the county.⁹

This attack proved a boomerang to the growers. A premature migration of apple pickers from the county resulted, and the labor shortage in both the apple and hop orchards became even more acute. Wage rates were raised, and relief clients were released from the rolls in an effort to recruit sufficient workers. The San Francisco Chronicle for September 7, 1935, reported that—

* * * the mob action of the vigilantes has frightened away so many workers that the county is 20 percent under the number of pickers needed. Pay was increased $\frac{1}{4}$ cent a pound, with payment of transportation, to induce pickers to come here, but the increase has had little effect in this regard.

Relief headquarters in San Francisco, in response to a hurried request, sent large numbers of workers to help with the harvest. WPA officials, according to the San Francisco News of August 18, 1935, loaded relief clients on trucks and dispatched them to the hop fields, where many of the inexperienced earned as little as 50 to 75 cents per day. The San Francisco Chronicle of September 7, 1935, reported that the State Emergency Relief Administration (SERA) sent more than 150 men into the fields in 1 day. The Simon J. Lubin Society stated that John Small, SERA Relief Director for San Francisco, took a total of 5,000 men off relief during the harvest season in order to force them to pick hops in Sonoma County.¹⁰

The entire incident aroused widespread and unfavorable public attention, even in some rather conservative circles. The American Civil Liberties Union offered a reward of \$1,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction, for felonious assault, of any of the 300 vigilantes who had taken part in the tarring and feathering episode.¹¹ Two prominent San Francisco newspapers, the News and the Chronicle, called upon State Attorney General Webb to take action.¹²

Mr. Webb finally acted when Governor Merriam several months later made \$20,000 available as a special investigating fund. Warrants were served on 23 alleged vigilantes on charges of kidnapping and assault with deadly weapons. The defendants, portrayed in a News editorial on August 18, 1935, as a "pack of lawless bullies masquerading as patriots," were indicted but later acquitted.

Spontaneous Strikes and Wage Increases in 1936

Spontaneous strikes among agricultural workers became noticeably larger and more numerous in California during 1936. They reflected a renewed militancy and strength among farm-labor unions organized both by the A.F. of L. and by unaffiliated Mexicans and Filipinos. The

⁹San Francisco Chronicle, August 23, 1935.

¹⁰Report Submitted to the President's Committee on Farm Tenancy, by Simon J. Lubin Society, San Francisco, January 12, 1937 (p. 3).

¹¹Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 2, September 1935.

¹²The News was reported to have interviewed him every day for 11 months, to ask what steps had been taken to apprehend the vigilantes.

largest spontaneous strike during 1936 included some 2,500 pea pickers employed on several large ranches in San Joaquin County during April. Violence was notably lacking, and the strikers won a rapid success in raising picking rates from the prevailing 20 to 30 cents per hamper. Organizers failed to form a union, however, because of the extreme mobility of the labor.¹³

Success also attended a spontaneous strike of several hundred potato pickers and packing-shed workers in Kern County during July. The movement began on a small and apparently unsuccessful scale. The Fresno Bee of May 30, 1936, reported that only 40 pickers in the Shafter area quit work, and that all of these were replaced by unemployed. The Rural Worker in its July 1936 issue, however, claimed that a later 4-day strike of several hundred potato workers was successful. Fifty cents per hour was demanded for general field workers and 50 to 75 cents per hour for packing-shed workers, in place of the prevailing 30 cents per hour. Despite the growers' refusal to meet a committee elected by the strikers, and despite their alleged use of armed vigilantes, the strikers were reemployed at a compromise increase in wage rates to 40 cents per hour.¹⁴

Other spontaneous field workers' strikes during 1936 were all small and short-lived. None involved as many as 300 workers, and only 2 lasted more than several days. All of them did, however, win at least partial wage increases for those participating. Chronologically these strikes occurred as follows:

March—75 poultry workers in Alameda County over the issue of working conditions. Results unknown.

April—35 fruit workers in Los Angeles County. Issues and results unknown.

June—250 pea pickers in Yolo County. Compromise wage gains.

July—52 vegetable workers in Merced County. Compromise wage gains.

July—250 peach pickers in Merced County. Compromise wage gains.

July—85 grape packers in Merced County. Compromise wage gains.

September—175 brussels sprouts and artichoke workers in Santa Cruz. Wage gains in full.

September—150 sugar-beet toppers in Santa Maria Valley, Santa Barbara. Compromise wage gains.

The spontaneous strike of sugar-beet toppers in the strongly unionized Santa Maria Valley began on September 10, when workers demanded an additional 10-percent increase in wage rates after one 10-percent increase had already been granted the previous week. The strike was settled after a week by a compromise 5-percent increase. Tomato growers in the area, who had just settled a wage dispute with their shed workers, complained of a shortage of field laborers. They were forced to increase all pay by 5 cents per hour in order to recruit sufficient help to save their crop.¹⁵

That spontaneous strikes were successful during 1936 was attested by the fact that nearly all of them won at least compromise gains. The general level of farm wages for almost all important crop areas of California had been raised by the end of the year. Substantial wage rises were granted voluntarily by growers on several occasions. Two hundred of the largest cotton raisers represented by the Agricultural Labor Bureau of the San Joaquin Valley, for instance, announced an increase in cotton-picking rates to \$1 per hundredweight—25 cents higher than the 1935

¹³Stockton Record, April 13, 1936.

¹⁴Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 12, July 1936.

¹⁵Los Angeles Times, September 11 and 12, 1936.

scale. The Bakersfield Californian applauded this move and stated optimistically that "the workers and the farmer will thus benefit from the new rate, and a harmonious relationship will be maintained to the advantage of the farmer, the worker, and the community."¹⁶

The revitalized Associated Farmers of California, despite its unprecedented strength and success during 1936 in breaking some of the largest strikes, nevertheless applied many conciliatory measures to nullify the growing militancy of agricultural workers. At a quarterly meeting of the board of directors during the summer of 1936, a resolution was passed requesting farmers not to ask for more workers than they actually needed, nor to ask workers to report until employers were ready to hire them.

To do otherwise is to create dissatisfaction and provide the workers with just cause for complaint; also it lessens the willingness of the public employment agencies to cooperate fully with farmers. (From *Apathy to Action*, No. 23, August 31, 1936.)

The Associated Farmers later announced that its executive committee had voted unanimously to refuse membership to "any man who is not willing to pay a fair wage to his employees in accordance with the prevailing wage in the community."¹⁷

Voluntary wage increases and other conciliatory gestures were designed to forestall agitation and counteract the accelerated organizing drive being carried out by left-wing elements in the A.F. of L. and independent unions of Mexicans and Filipinos. The readiness of growers to concede wage increases where unorganized spontaneous strikes broke out may have been prompted by the fear that recalcitrance would lead strikers to seek more militant leadership from the outside. There were good grounds for these apprehensions. The majority of spontaneous strikes that broke out during the next few years soon came under the control of unions, some of which were independent and some affiliated to the A.F. of L. and C.I.O.

Unionism Among Mexicans

The most effective agricultural-labor unions during 1935 and 1936 were those organized among Mexicans. They had furnished most of the membership in the C.&A.W.I.U. during the turbulent strike years of 1933 and 1934. Conflict had at times attended Communist organizers' efforts to "capture" Mexican organizations. Mexican consuls on occasion had attempted to split the C.&A.W.I.U. by organizing their compatriots into independent racial unions which could bargain as separate groups with grower-employers. In the Imperial Valley this contest had resulted in the defeat of both organizations.¹⁸

A Mexican union which had undergone a similar conflict in Los Angeles County survived, and soon became the most active farm workers organization in the State. This was the *Confederación de Uniones de Campesinos y Obreros Mexicanos del Estado de California*, or C.U.C.O.M., which had developed out of the general strike in strawberries,

¹⁶Bakersfield Californian, September 10, 1936.

¹⁷San Francisco News, August 19, 1937.

¹⁸See Chapter VIII (pp.107-110).

celery, and other crops, during June 1933.¹⁹ By 1934 this organization claimed as many as 10,000 members. Its policy and leadership were again coordinated with the C.&A.W.I.U. and the two unions carried out at least one strike under a united-front agreement.

Several nominally independent local Mexican unions in addition to the C.U.C.O.M. were organized following the collapse of the C.&A.W.I.U. Some of these, the growers charged, were fronts for Communist organizers. Such were the Mexican Agricultural Workers Union in Santa Barbara, which led a strike in August 1934 of some 300 vegetable workers;²⁰ and the American Mexican Union in San Joaquin County which, in June 1935, led a small strike of cherry pickers in the vicinity of Lodi, to enforce a demand for 6 cents per box instead of the prevailing rate of 4½ cents. Deputy sheriffs armed with tear-gas bombs were reported to have patrolled the area and made a few arrests.²¹

No Communist affiliations, however, were imputed to the independent Mexican Labor Union of the Santa Maria Valley, in Santa Barbara County, which cooperated with a local union of Filipinos and a local union of white vegetable packing-house workers in joint strikes and collective-bargaining agreements (see page 126).

Left-wing farm-labor organizers placed their main support behind the C.U.C.O.M. and ultimately assumed control of it. Six of the 18 strikes reported in field and processing industries in California during 1935 came under the leadership of this union. Orange and San Diego Counties in southern California, seat of the union's strength, were the trouble centers. Though minor in comparison to the great mass movements of 1933, these strikes contributed notably to the techniques of collective bargaining and labor arbitration in agriculture. Even without resorting to strikes, the C.U.C.O.M. was able to gain several signed contracts granting wage increases, improvements in working conditions, union recognition, and job preference for members.

A series of strikes involved organized workers in Orange County during 1935. A 1-day walk-out in January won compromise wage gains for 200 celery workers belonging to the C.U.C.O.M.²² This was followed on February 15, 1935, by a short and unsuccessful strike of 150 C.U.C.O.M. members working in pea and squash crops near Santa Ana.²³ A few days later a general strike developed under the leadership of the Mexican organization, supported by working members of the local independent Filipino Labor Union and the white International Farm Labor Association, Branch No. 3, Orange County (a short-lived body reportedly established by Communist organizers after dissolution of the C.&A.W.I.U.). The strike, which lasted almost a month, covered a major part of the pea, celery, and lettuce crops of the county. A settlement was finally reached, partly through the efforts of the Orange County Arbitration Board. A signed agreement was drawn up between the organized strikers and various local and county Japanese growers' associations, granting a minimum wage scale of \$2.15 per 9-hour day for permanent labor, 25 cents per hour for temporary labor, and time and a half for overtime.²⁴

¹⁹See Chapter VIII (pp. 89-90).

²⁰San Francisco Examiner, August 19, 1934; Pacific Rural Press, September 12, 1936.

²¹Los Angeles Times, June 4, 1935; Western Worker, June 6, 1935.

²²Western Worker, January 14, 1935.

²³Idem, February 18, 1935.

²⁴Idem, February 28, 1934.

During October and November 1935, the C.U.C.O.M. again was supported by the independent Filipino Labor Union and the American Industrial Workers Union (successor to the International Farm Labor Association) in a strike of 400 citrus workers near Santa Ana.²⁵ Previously, during May, a small strike of 85 orange pickers in San Diego County under the combined leadership of a local branch of the C.U.C.O.M. and the new Vegetable and Citrus Federal Labor Union of the A.F. of L. had won compromise adjustments in wage scales.²⁶ The C.U.C.O.M. in July 1934 had negotiated an agreement with organized Japanese growers of the county, providing for standard wages, union recognition, and arbitration of disputes.²⁷ This was renewed in August 1935. Some 3,000 workers were estimated to be covered.

Federation of Agricultural Workers Unions of America

Left-wing organizers during 1935 had plans under way to coordinate the policies of farm-labor unions along broader State and regional lines. The National Committee for Unity of Agricultural and Rural Workers had been established for this purpose, and it rendered substantial aid to rural organizations of all types. The immediate program called for affiliating all such local unions to the A.F. of L. as federal labor unions. Ultimately it was planned to federate these into a separate A.F. of L. international union of agricultural and allied workers.

Independent Filipino and Mexican unions in southern California, composed solely of low-paid and seasonally employed field workers, could not afford the high initiation fees and dues charged by the A.F. of L.²⁸ On the other hand, the notable gains in collective bargaining won by the C.U.C.O.M., and its successful cooperation with other racial groups in several strikes, made the prospect of establishing a State-wide organization of agricultural and allied workers more hopeful. It was recognized that unified control and cooperation among organized racial groups would be necessary if collective bargaining and strike action were to be made effective over wide crop areas in which the growers were highly organized.

A temporary Federation of Agricultural Workers Unions of America was formed during January 1936, at a convention in Los Angeles of organized farm-labor representatives of southern California. It was composed of several independent local organizations of Mexicans, Filipinos, and others, and a few months after its formation it was joined by the newly organized Japanese Farm Workers Union. The key group in the Federation was the C.U.C.O.M., which furnished the chief leaders and most of the rank and file membership.

CELERY STRIKE, APRIL 1936

The Federation's attempts to enforce a schedule of union demands in the celery crop of Los Angeles County precipitated a series of strikes

²⁵Pacific Rural Press, September 12, 1936.

²⁶Western Worker, June 6, 1935.

²⁷See Appendix H: Agreements between Japanese Farmers and the Union of Laborers and Field Workers, San Diego County, 1934 (p. 430).

²⁸Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 13, August 1936 (p. 5).

during the spring of 1936. The first was a small strike of Mexican and Filipino workers on the farms of the H. P. Garin Co. in San Diego County, who in February attempted unsuccessfully to enforce demands for union recognition, 60-percent union preference, and a minimum wage scale of 30 cents per hour. This was followed in April by a walk-out of 300 workers in the Venice area under the leadership of the C.U.C.O.M., when that organization's request for higher wages and union recognition was refused by the organized Japanese growers.²⁹

Eleven unions affiliated to the Federation of Agricultural Workers Unions of America then presented these blanket demands to the growers: That 90 percent of the laborers in the field should be members of the F.A.W.U.A.; that union men in the field when at work should be paid a minimum of 30 cents per hour, and celery workers a minimum of 40 cents per hour, for a 9-hour day; and that overtime, including Sundays and holidays, should be paid at the rate of time and a half.³⁰ Within a few weeks the walk-out had grown to include some 2,600 celery workers (including a minority of Filipinos) in such localities as El Monte, Torrence, Harbor City, Lovita, Palos Verdes, Norwalk, Carmentia, and Bellflower.³¹

Authorities took strong measures to suppress the movement. Union spokesmen claimed that a force of approximately 1,500 armed men, including deputy sheriffs, special guards, and Los Angeles city police led by Capt. William ("Red") Hynes, was mobilized to break up parades and picket lines. Several strikers were reported struck and burned by tear-gas bombs, and many were arrested.³² The Public Works and Unemployed Union of Santa Monica sent a message to the White House protesting "provocation and intimidation" of strikers and sympathizers by the Los Angeles "Red Squad."³³

The constituent unions of the F.A.W.U.A. showed signs of winning after more than 2 months on strike, despite the severity of the opposition. The long duration of the walk-out was due to a deadlock which developed in negotiations between representatives of the Japanese Growers Association and its affiliates in Los Angeles County on the one hand, and those of the C.U.C.O.M., the Filipino Farm Labor Union, and the Japanese Labor Union on the other. Growers claimed that the unions were Communist-controlled. Chinichi Kato, secretary of the Southern California Farm Federation, stated flatly that his organization would not meet with the workers while a "radical and Communist-dominated group, led by Lillian Monroe, was in control."³³ The F.A.W.U.A. nevertheless claimed, by July 1936, that 385 growers had signed an agreement granting union demands.³⁴ Mediation by the U.S. Department of Labor finally settled the strike on the basis of 60-percent union preference in employment and a minimum wage of 30 cents per hour for field labor.³⁵

CITRUS STRIKE IN ORANGE COUNTY, JUNE-JULY 1936

The Los Angeles celery strike during the spring and summer of 1936 had repercussions in other crops and in adjoining counties. Late in May, 300 strawberry pickers struck for wage increases and union recognition.

²⁹Los Angeles Examiner, April 22, 1936.

³⁰Field notes.

³¹Western Worker, August 17, 1936.

³²Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 11, p. 1; Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Fields* (p. 244).

³³Field notes.

³⁴Western Worker, July 9, 1936.

³⁵Idem, August 17, 1936; Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 13, August 1936.

In July, about 200 bean pickers belonging to the C.U.C.O.M. went on strike in the vicinity of Palos Verdes to enforce similar demands; although they won a wage raise from 22½ to 30 cents per hour, they lost their demand for union recognition. Union spokesmen claimed that "vigilante terror" was on occasion employed against strikers.³⁶

Violence in labor relations reached its climax in southern California during a strike of 2,500 to 3,000 citrus-fruit pickers and packers in Orange County. It occurred while the celery strike was still in progress, and was under much the same leadership. The C.U.C.O.M. called the strike on June 15 in order to enforce a series of union demands: Wage increases from the prevailing 5½ cents per box (which averaged 22 cents per hour) to 27½ cents per hour, free transportation instead of the prevailing charges of 10 to 20 cents for being taken to and from groves, union recognition, and other minor provisions.³⁷

The methods of suppression corresponded closely to those used in the Los Angeles celery strike. Large numbers of strikers were evicted from their homes; 400 special armed guards were recruited by growers to patrol fields and protect strikebreakers; highway police disrupted strikers' parades and picket lines; some 200 people were arrested and jailed in a stockade; and numerous strikers were injured when growers (to quote the Los Angeles Examiner, July 11, 1936) commissioned "bands of armed men, armed with tear gas and shotguns," to conduct "open private warfare against citrus strikers." The Los Angeles Times pictured one clash as follows:

HUNDREDS JAILED AS CITRUS RIOTERS ATTACK WORKERS

(Placentia, July 6). A miniature civil war broke out in Orange County this afternoon as hundreds of citrus strikers in a concerted offensive swooped on groves in a wide area and attacked growers and workers with guns, chains, knives, and rocks.

A prominent citrus-association official was beaten on the head with a chain, 1 agitator was shot, dozens of persons were hurt, and 75 strikers were seized in a pitched battle near Placentia. By late afternoon more than 200 agitators had been arrested and taken to the county jail at Santa Ana.

A counterattack against the strikers a few days later was described no less colorfully, in the July 11, 1936, issue of the Times:

VIGILANTES BATTLE CITRUS STRIKERS IN WAR AGAINST REDS

Two Meeting Places Smashed up;

Roving Carloads of Ex-Workers Hunted by Authorities

(Anaheim, July 10). Drawing first blood in the retaliation against Communist disorder in the Orange County citrus area, night riders struck again early today with clubs and sent one man to a hospital and nearly demolished a rendezvous.

Tear-gas bombs and clubs flew and men went down like tenpins when a group of 150 asserted strikers in a conclave in a public handball court in Placentia was attacked.

Walter Cowan, vice-president of the State Federation of Labor, and J. W. Buzzell, secretary of the Los Angeles Central Labor Council, were arrested while investigating the strike. They declared in a special communication to Attorney General Webb that all law had been suspended in Orange County in an effort to terrorize and starve strikers into submission.³⁸

Organized growers represented by the Associated Farmers charged that the labor trouble was due entirely to the activities of Communist

³⁶Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 14, September 1936.

³⁷Idem, Vol. I, No. 12, July 1936; Vol. I, No. 13, August 1936.

³⁸Hollywood Citizen News, July 17, 1936.

labor leaders in the F.A.W.U.A., most active of whom were Velarde and Avila (Mexican), Mensalves (Filipino), and Deguchi (Japanese). Growers maintained further that the situation constituted a "labor boycott" rather than a strike. It was argued that as the laborers had refused beforehand to take the jobs, the growers were under no responsibility to deal with them.³⁹

Gilermo Velarde, president of the Mexican C.U.C.O.M. conducting the strike, charged that representatives of the local Mexican consul's office were trying to trick the strikers into signing an unfavorable agreement with growers.⁴⁰ The Associated Farmers, on the other hand, claimed that the consul and his aides were "constantly active in fomenting trouble."⁴¹

It was evident by the end of July that the strike was lost, as pickers returned to work in steadily increasing numbers. The union, in the final settlement, won some minor gains in wages and working conditions, but failed to attain union recognition from the organized growers in the citrus industry.⁴²

Beginning of State-wide Unionism

The citrus strike marked a turning point in agricultural relations in California. One result was the revival of the powerful anti-union Associated Farmers of California, which had been inactive since crushing the C.&A.W.I.U. in 1934.⁴³

The series of outbreaks under radical leadership in southern California, culminating in the large celery and citrus strikes, again aroused grower-employer interests throughout the State and impelled them to join protective organizations under the aegis of the Associated Farmers. At the same time, the violence employed by law officers and vigilantes in several strikes caused widespread apprehension among organized labor circles. Urban affiliates of the State Federation of Labor foresaw an ultimate threat to their own security and thus sought to guard their "back door" by encouraging strong labor organizations in rural areas. Independent unions of Mexicans and Filipinos saw their weakness as separate organizations of field workers lacking the support of the more powerful urban labor bodies, and their interest in affiliation with the A.F. of L. and other unions grew accordingly.

The C.U.C.O.M. and other farm-labor organizations, during 1936 and 1937, participated in several conferences held to form a State-wide federation of agricultural and allied workers to be chartered by the A.F. of L. Local unions at the same time cooperated more closely than before with organizations of unemployed in order to prevent relief authorities from releasing their clients for farm work. As already noted, the C.U.C.O.M. and other agricultural-labor unions drew up an agreement

³⁹From *Apathy to Action* (San Francisco), Bulletin No. 20, July 29, 1936.

⁴⁰Hollywood Citizen News, July 17, 1936.

⁴¹From *Apathy to Action* (San Francisco), Bulletin No. 20, July 29, 1936.

⁴²Idem, Bulletin No. 20, July 29, 1936; New York Times, July 27, 1936.

⁴³The association had almost ended because of a shortage of funds and a declining membership. After the major drive of the C.&A.W.I.U. had ended, and the threat to the main grower-employers was temporarily over, urban and agrarian interests were little inclined to make large financial outlays for maintaining it. (See Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 49, pp. 17931-33, 17938-47.)

with the Workers Alliance in several towns to provide for transference of membership⁴⁴ and prevention of strikebreaking by unemployed. According to Alliance spokesmen, its aim was to "secure relief for striking agricultural workers and support their strikes with pickets."⁴⁴

Grower-labor relations on the whole were more stable and peaceful during 1937 than they had been for years. In Los Angeles County, which had witnessed the celery workers' violent strike during the previous year, representatives of nearly 5,000 farm workers in April signed a new union contract with the Central Japanese Association of Southern California, representing growers in the Venice Palms area. The provisions of the agreement were as follows:

- (1) Recognition of the unions as agents for collective bargaining, including their right to have delegates in the field to make contacts with workers.
- (2) Growers to refrain from interfering with union activities of the workers.
- (3) Abolition of the contractor system in fields.
- (4) Minimum wage of 35 cents per hour for all field workers.
- (5) Contract to last 1 year, with no strikes or lock-outs.
- (6) Grievance committee of 3 (1 from growers, 1 from the unions, 1 neutral) to settle all disputes that may arise.⁴⁵

The agreement was drawn up in negotiations between representatives of the Japanese growers, the Mexican consul (for the workers), and the State Labor Commissioner's office. It was then ratified by the Mexican Agricultural Workers Union, the Filipino Labor Federation, and the Japanese Farm Workers Union.

Mexicans organized in their own unions participated in a few strikes in southern California during 1937. Approximately 450 celery workers in San Diego County struck for 6 days during January under the leadership of the C.U.C.O.M. They returned to work without achieving the wage increases and union recognition demanded. Three small walk-outs of unorganized Mexican workers took place in the citrus orchards of southern California. In Ventura County, in February and again in May, two 1-week strikes of 120 and 100 workers, respectively, as well as one small strike of 45 citrus workers in San Diego County during the latter month, were all settled with compromise wage gains.⁴⁶

Most of the Mexican and other farm-labor organizations in California sent delegates to the Denver convention in July 1937, and joined the C.I.O.'s new United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (U.C.A.P.A.W.A.). A few "race conscious" Mexican unions continued to function separately. In some areas, as in the Santa Maria Valley, they cooperated effectively with other labor organizations in collective bargaining; in other areas, as in Orange County, they became involved in jurisdictional disputes with the A.F. of L. and C.I.O.

⁴⁴Under the terms of the agreement, paid-up membership books of the Workers Alliance were accepted by the Agricultural Workers Union in place of its own initiation fee when an Alliance member went to work in the fields. A farm worker who belonged to the C.U.C.O.M. likewise could join the Workers Alliance without paying additional fees when unemployed. (Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 16, December 1936.)

⁴⁵The wage scale specified 35 cents per hour for specialty crops, chiefly celery and cauliflower, in Los Angeles County. The agreement did not, however, include workers in the Venice celery area, scene of the major strike in 1936, nor did it apply to berry pickers. (Los Angeles Illustrated News, Apr. 30, 1937; Commonwealth Times, Vol. I, No. 8, Apr. 23, 1937.)

⁴⁶Los Angeles Times, May 7, 1937; Josiah Folsom: Labor Disputes in Agriculture, 1927-39.

Unionism Among Filipinos

Filipinos as well as Mexicans had been an active element in strikes led by the C.&A.W.I.U. This union, from its beginning, had gained the affiliation of many Filipinos because it had been one of the few organizations to come to their defense when they were the victims of mob action in the race riots early in the depression.⁴⁷ They were reported to have participated in large numbers in at least 10 strikes led by the union during its 3 most active years. Chronologically these occurred as follows:

Strikes In Which Filipinos Participated

		<i>County</i>	<i>Demands</i>
May 1932	Pea pickers	San Mateo	Wage increases, improved housing, and medical services.
November 1932	Orchard workers	Solano	Wage increase and an 8-hour day.
April 1933	Pea pickers	Alameda and Santa Clara.	Wage increases.
August 1933	Lettuce workers	Monterey (Salinas and Watsonville).	Wage increases.
August 1933	Grape pickers	Kern	Wage increases.
August 1933	Beet workers	Ventura (Oxnard)....	Elimination of contractors, and union recognition.
January 1934	Spinach cutters	San Mateo	Wage increases.
February 1934	Brussels-sprouts workers.	San Joaquin (Pescadero).	Wage increases.
March 1934	Asparagus cutters ...	Sacramento	Wage increases.
April 1934	Strawberry pickers ..	Sacramento	Wage increases.

Independent farm labor unions grew rapidly among Filipinos, as among Mexicans, after the C.&A.W.I.U. became inactive.⁴⁸ Some of their organizers had been active previously in the Communist organization. The strike of lettuce-field workers in the Salinas-Watsonville area, for instance, had involved the Filipino Labor Chamber, and the Filipino Protective Union had participated in the strike of beet laborers in the Oxnard area of Ventura County.⁴⁸ Other organizers tended to be nationalistic and anti-Communist in sentiment. Independent Filipino unions in a few notable instances acted jointly with the A.F. of L. in strikes and collective-bargaining agreements.

One of the most important field workers' unions to be organized by this racial minority was the Filipino Labor Union Incorporated, chartered in the early summer of 1934. Shortly after its formation it joined a local A.F. of L. shed workers' union in a general strike throughout the lettuce industry of Salinas. The Filipino union had been negotiating with organized grower-shippers for wage increases and improved working conditions. Failing to win these demands, the members voted to strike on September 1. White shed workers organized in the Salinas Vegetable Packers Association No. 18211, A.F. of L., also drafted a schedule of demands regarding wage scales and working conditions and voted to join

⁴⁷See Chapter VIII (pp. 83-84).

⁴⁸Among the organizations developed at one time or another in California, according to various observers, were the following: The Filipino Labor Association, the Filipino Labor Supply Association, and the Filipino Agricultural Labor Association, all of Stockton; the Philippine Labor Chamber of Salinas; the Filipino United Labor Economic Endeavor of Santa Maria Valley, Guadalupe; the Filipino United Labor Association of San Joaquin Valley, Delano; the Filipino Unity Labor Association of Dinuba; the Filipino Labor Association of Fresno; and the Filipino Labor Union Incorporated of Guadalupe, which by 1935 reported 7 branches with a total membership of 2,000. (See Carey McWilliams: *Exit the Filipino*, in *The Nation*, Sept. 4, 1935.)

the Filipinos in a joint collective-bargaining effort. Field workers' wages were to be raised from the prevailing 30 to 40 cents per hour; men and women trimmers being paid 40 to 50 cents per hour were to be advanced to a minimum of 60 cents; and a 48-hour week was to be established, with time and a half for overtime, Sundays, and holidays.⁴⁹ Representatives of the two unions signed an agreement stipulating that neither would return to work until the demands of both were satisfied.

Outside mediators from State and county government agencies were reported to have appeared on the fourth day of the strike, addressed mass meetings of strikers in the Rodeo grounds, and appealed to them to return to work and disregard "outside agitators." Shed workers' Local No. 18211 at a separate meeting then voted to let the Monterey County Industrial Relations Board⁵⁰ settle the issues. The Filipino field workers voted to continue to strike and maintain their picket lines; apparently they were misled by "runners" who were supposed to keep them informed of developments. A number of white shed workers attempted to resume the strike but were forced to return to work when J. M. Casey, west coast representative of the A.F. of L., threatened to revoke their charter.⁵¹

Thus isolated, the Filipinos were subjected to violent attack. While the Industrial Relations Board was in session, vigilantes burned a large labor camp owned by the president of the Filipino Labor Union Incorporated and inhabited by most of the union members. Some 800 Filipinos were reported to have been driven from the county at rifle point.⁵²

The Filipino Labor Union Incorporated subsequently transferred its headquarters to Guadalupe, in the Santa Maria Valley of Santa Barbara County.⁵³ By September 1936, it claimed 10 branches, having a membership of several thousand, and had built an \$8,000 labor temple.⁵⁴

The union worked in close cooperation with an independent Mexican labor union of field workers and a local branch of Vegetable Packers Association Local No. 18211. Mexicans and Filipinos in the valley previously had gone on a strike together, under the leadership of the C. & A.W.I.U. in 1933. This effort had failed because of inadequate preliminary organization and the successful recruiting of strikebreakers by contractors and growers.⁵⁵ More than 3,000 workers of all three racial groups (Filipino, Mexican, and white) participated in a strike of almost 3 weeks, during November 1934, and were successful in winning wage increases to 30 cents per hour and other concessions.⁵⁵ For several years afterward, Filipinos, Mexicans, and whites were organized in their own unions and continued to cooperate. Under joint arbitration agreements they maintained peaceful collective-bargaining relations with organized grower-shippers in the Santa Maria Valley.

Organized Filipinos during 1935 and 1936 cooperated with other racial groups also in Orange, Los Angeles, and San Diego Counties. In Orange County they participated with the Mexican C.U.C.O.M. and a

⁴⁹Western Worker, August 30, 1934; also A. Alston: A brief History of the Fruit and Vegetable Industry of the Pacific Coast (unpublished) (p. 12).

⁵⁰This board had been formed in the spring of 1934, through the efforts of Local No. 18211 and other unions to find a satisfactory alternative to a projected antipicketing ordinance that the City Council of Salinas attempted to pass.

⁵¹Alston, op. cit. (pp. 12-14).

⁵²San Francisco Chronicle, September 25, 1936.

The final decision by the Industrial Relations Board was a slight raise for all classes of shed workers, time and a half for overtime, Sundays, and holidays, time and a third for all work after 10 p.m., union recognition, and other concessions. (Alston, op. cit., pp. 12-13.)

⁵³Pacific Weekly, Vol. IV, No. 17, April 27, 1936 (p. 228).

⁵⁴Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 13, August 1936 (p. 5).

⁵⁵Idem, Vol. I, No. 8, March 1936 (p. 5).

local union of whites, in a strike of vegetable workers during February and March 1935 and a strike of orange pickers in November. Early in 1936 a local of Filipinos joined other field workers' organizations in the F.A.W.U.A. During the summer it participated in a minor capacity in the large celery and citrus strikes in Los Angeles and Orange Counties, and later in negotiations for signed union agreements with Japanese growers' associations in southern California.⁵⁶

In the Imperial Valley during this period, on the other hand, the growers claimed that the Filipinos created a labor problem. They were supplanting Mexican laborers in lettuce and other crops through underbidding wages. By working for from \$3.25 to \$4.50 per acre at thinning lettuce, instead of the \$5 rate usually demanded, Filipinos were displacing Mexicans, who in turn were going on relief so as to be available for dam-construction jobs. Growers were having to depend increasingly on white migrants and Filipino laborers, and as the Brawley News observed, "since the latter in other years have brought labor disturbances in the valley, growers are not pleased."

The Filipino Labor Union Incorporated meanwhile was meeting with mixed success. It assumed control of a spontaneous strike of 100 pea pickers in the vicinity of San Luis Obispo during January 1935, and organized a new local. The strike failed. During September 1936, some 175 to 200 union members carried out a successful strike in the artichoke and brussels-sprouts crops of Santa Cruz County. The walk-out occurred during the peak harvest season, at the same time that the famous strike of lettuce-shed workers was in progress in Salinas. The Filipinos on the larger ranches were able to win wage increases, establishing a union scale of 35 cents per hour. "Harassed growers" were reported attempting to import nonunion white workers from other counties, because, at the time the strike broke out, there were not enough local whites to supplant the Filipinos.⁵⁷

A dissident group in the Filipino Labor Union Incorporated organized a separate union and submitted the following schedule of demands to the Japanese Growers Association of San Luis Obispo County, early in 1937:

(1) That the employers recognize the Filipino Labor Union, Pismo Beach branch, as the collective-bargaining agency on all matters regarding wages, hours, and working conditions in the San Luis Obispo County vegetable industry.

(2) That an agreement be signed by the employers and the union which shall be in force and effect for the period of 1 year.

(3) That a minimum wage of 35 cents per hour be paid field workers.

(4) That no discrimination because of union affiliation be applied in hiring workers.

(5) That a 10-hour day be in force, with time and a half for overtime, Sundays, and holidays.

(6) That wages be paid every 15 days.⁵⁸

A strike of about 200 fruit and vegetable workers was called on ranches in the vicinities of Oceana, Pismo Beach, and Arroyo Grande to enforce these demands, but only a few minor gains were won. The strikers were checked by numerous arrests, after the county board of supervisors passed an antipicketing ordinance.

Filipino agricultural labor unions lost other strikes in early 1937. A small walk-out of 40 spinach cutters in Milpitas was broken immediately through complete replacement by other workers.⁵⁹ The largest field

⁵⁶See pp. 127-128.

⁵⁷Oakland Tribune, September 17, 1936.

⁵⁸Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 2, February 1937 (p. 5).

⁵⁹Farm Labor News (Modesto), April 9, 1937.

workers' strike of the year, a spontaneous walk-out of more than 1,000 pea pickers in San Luis Obispo County, during April, was suppressed within 2 days by local law-enforcement authorities. They declared the strike was illegal because it was not called by a recognized organization, despite the fact that it was supported by the Filipino Labor Union and the county central labor council.⁶⁰

The impotence of spontaneous strikes and independent local unions in the face of strong opposition from organized grower-employers was becoming steadily more apparent. Revival of the anti-union Associated Farmers of California and its county subdivisions generated widespread sentiment among Filipinos, as among Mexicans, in favor of affiliation with the A.F. of L. Unions of Filipinos had won their greatest gains when they had cooperated closely with organized Mexicans and whites, as in Los Angeles, San Diego, and Orange Counties, and in the Santa Maria Valley of Santa Barbara County. By themselves they had lost heavily in membership, as workers migrated seasonally to crops grown in other areas. Federation of these local unions on a State-wide basis, allowing for transference of members among locals as they changed location, was urged as the only means for keeping migratory workers unionized.⁶¹ Left-wing elements, in particular, in the Filipino unions, favored affiliation with the A.F. of L. in a general federation of agricultural and allied workers in California. Their representatives attended the State-wide conferences held during late 1936 and 1937.⁶²

Other Filipino groups opposed this move. Labor contractors organized in the Filipino Labor Supply Association of Stockton were racially exclusive in policy. They refused membership to non-Filipino contractors, and petitioned the Central California Grower-Shipper Association to grant preferential hiring of the laborers they recruited and to pay the contractors a minimum of 60 cents per hour for field supervision. Although primarily a type of employers' organization, the association at times attempted to utilize methods of collective bargaining common to labor unions. Left-wing organizers, however, considered this group a form of company union.⁶³

Leaders of the Filipino Labor Union Incorporated also favored a policy of racial exclusiveness and opposed affiliation with other labor organizations. A split developed within the union during the Salinas shed packers' strike of 1936. The left-wing element led by Secretary C. D. Mensalves attempted to organize a sympathetic walk-out of Filipino field workers in support of the A.F. of L. Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union No. 18211.⁶⁴ When this move was opposed by other officials of

⁶⁰San Francisco News, April 15, 1937; Commonwealth Times (Organ of the Filipino Labor Union, Guadalupe) April 23, 1937.

⁶¹Commonwealth Times, Vol. I, No. 18, April 23, 1937.

⁶²See Chapter X (pp. 145-146).

⁶³In an address to the association, President M. M. Insigne claimed that Filipino labor in Salinas, under the "paternal and sane guidance of the labor contractors," felt confidence in the "spirit of fair play and mutual cooperation between Filipino laborers and their employers." He opposed accepting non-Filipino contractors as members, and stated that "even without having to organize the Filipino farm hands into a union, they are already enjoying the right of collective bargaining and preferential hiring through the labor contractors who rebargain for them with the employers." (Philippines Mail, Salinas, Vol. VII, No. 19, Feb. 8, 1937, p. 1.)

The more articulate elements in the Filipino community upheld the views of organized Filipino contractors. The Philippines Mail, in an editorial commending the election of "humanitarian and progressive young community leaders" to the Filipino Labor Supply Association, felt that outside Salinas there were "unjustified distrust and unfair rumors" leveled against the organization by union labor. The paper commented: "We found it not an easy task to justify the faith of our laborers in the fairness of our labor contractors." (Philippines Mail, Salinas, Vol. VIII, No. 6, January 17, 1938, p. 2.)

⁶⁴See Chapter X (p. 139).

the union, Mensalves and his supporters withdrew and formed the separate Filipino Labor Union (unincorporated). This organization attended the convention at Denver in July 1937, and was later absorbed into the C.I.O.'s new international, the U.C.A.P.A.W.A.

The original Filipino Labor Union Incorporated late in 1937 underwent a second split. President Reyes of Branch No. 4 at Guadalupe formed a new organization, the Philippine Islands Labor Union Incorporated, and assumed control of the \$8,000 labor temple. He claimed that Branch No. 4 of the Filipino Labor Union Incorporated had been dissolved, and that the Philippine Islands Labor Union Incorporated had been organized as a new corporation. Officers of the Filipino Labor Union Incorporated, on the other hand, contended that Branch No. 4 could not be dissolved without authorization from the union's executive council.⁶⁵ The new Philippine Islands Labor Union Incorporated survived the ensuing litigation and continued to function effectively in the Santa Maria Valley in cooperation with the local Mexican Labor Union. It remained the most important independent union of Filipinos in California until the spring of 1939, when the powerful Filipino Agricultural Labor Association, or F.A.L.A., was formed in Stockton.

⁶⁵Philippines Mail, December 6, 1937 (p. 1); Philippines Journal, August 26, 1939 (p. 2).

CHAPTER X.—The American Federation of Labor

The A.F. of L. and Left-Wing Unionists

Far overshadowing other farm-labor movements following the collapse of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union was the expansion of the American Federation of Labor in agriculture and allied industries of California. This organization in time absorbed most of the independent unions that had been organized among racial minorities or developed from spontaneous strikes. In the late thirties it furnished the foundation for the extensive organizing campaign launched by the Committee for Industrial Organization in agriculture.

The A.F. of L.'s new interest in agricultural and allied workers began partly as a byproduct of the general revival in labor unionism under the indirect stimulus of the National Industrial Recovery Act during 1933 and 1934. Unions in key transportation industries rapidly increased in power, particularly the Brotherhood of Teamsters in highway trucking, and the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen in ocean and inland water transportation. These constituted a strong spearhead for organizing field and processing workers in California agriculture.

The A.F. of L.'s new campaign was stimulated also by the infiltration of left-wing organizers into its ranks. The C.&A.W.I.U. policy had been too aggressive and revolutionary to appeal to its rank and file members for very long, and to survive as a movement having close contact with the masses of workers the Communist union was forced to align itself with other organizations. Independent racial unions and federal labor unions of the A.F. of L. were more conciliatory in policy and their ultimate objectives were more limited and tangible, so that in the long run they were more acceptable than the C.&A.W.I.U. to the agricultural workers. The Communist Party therefore abandoned during 1934 its policy of opposition and "dual unionism," and formally dissolved its Trade Union Unity League in 1935. It adopted again its former policy of boring from within and of enlisting the support of the A.F. of L. and other unions. The influence of liberal and left-wing labor leaders, supported by an enlarged representation of unskilled and semiskilled production workers who had been unionized during 1933 and 1934, led the A.F. of L. to adopt a broader organizing program.

The new campaign among agricultural and allied laborers began on a Nation-wide scale in early 1935, when the National Committee for Unity of Agricultural and Rural Workers was formed in Washington, D. C. This body was designed to enlist the aid of urban trade-unions and other sympathizers in organizing farm-labor unions. The latter were to be chartered as federal labor unions of the A.F. of L. and ultimately united in a new international federation of agricultural, packing-house, and cannery labor.¹

The more active leaders of the formerly "dual" and antagonistic C.&A.W.I.U. in California now became the strongest supporters of the A.F. of L. Pat Chambers and Caroline Decker, district organizers of the

¹Program and Organization adopted at the National Conference of Agricultural, Lumber and Rural Workers (mimeographed), 4 pp., Washington, D. C., January 9, 1935.

C.&A.W.I.U. in the major strikes of 1933 and 1934, had been convicted of criminal syndicalism in 1935. From prison they issued a "call for unity" to all agricultural and cannery workers, urging them to join the A.F. of L.

Instead of allowing ourselves to be divided, we should all unite to fight for our common demands. If we remain divided, the employers will continue to use one group against the other. Therefore, the District Committee of the C.&A.W.I.U. urges all workers, organized and unorganized, to join the A.F. of L. (*Rural Worker*, Vol. I, No. 1, August 1935, p. 3.)

Donald Henderson, president of the renamed National Committee of Agricultural Workers, later wrote a lengthy article in that organization's official paper, the *Rural Worker*, explaining more fully the failure of the C.&A.W.I.U. and the need for the shift in union policy:

* * * It [the C.&A.W.I.U.] failed * * * to develop a stable organization. Three reasons should be recognized for this failure so as to prevent a repetition.

First, it was an independent trade-union unaffiliated to the rest of California's trade-union movement. It received little or no support, and in many cases bitter and active opposition, from the official A.F. of L. unions, central and State bodies. This was due as much to the unwillingness of the A.F. of L. groups at that time to help organize the agricultural field workers as it was to the fact that the C.&A.W.I.U. was an independent union.

Second, the C.&A.W.I.U. was based too exclusively on the migratory field workers. The union failed to concentrate sufficiently on the more regularly employed and higher-paid workers who would have supplied a more stable group for permanent organization.

Third, the weakness of the trade-union movement in the smaller cities and of small farmer organizations in the rural regions made it difficult to stop terror and vigilantism against the union.

Important aspects of the situation in California give hope that a real beginning is being made in developing a stable trade-union movement on a State-wide scale. Of fundamental importance is the growth of the A.F. of L. trade-unions generally throughout the State, and the increased unionization in the smaller cities. Accompanying this growth in trade-union membership, there has developed a more progressive and intelligent union and central labor-union leadership that recognizes the importance and necessity of organizing workers in agriculture.

A greater willingness to assist agricultural trade-unions get charters and help in solving their organizational problem is apparent in a large number of the central labor unions throughout the State. (*Rural Worker*, Vol. I, No. 15, November 1936, p. 2.)

Packing-Shed Workers' Unions in the A.F. of L.

Hitherto the A.F. of L., dominated by the skilled craft unions, had evinced little interest in organizing seasonal workers in agriculture and allied industries, and its officials had tended to ignore the low-paid casually employed laborers. According to Paul Scharrenberg, former secretary of the California State Federation of Labor, "Only fanatics are willing to live in shacks or tents and get their heads broken in the interests of migratory labor."² Strong racial divisions, paralleling occupational lines, had impelled the federation to confine such organizing efforts as were made to the skilled and semiskilled white workers in packing sheds and canneries, and to exclude unskilled and predominantly nonwhite field or "stoop" laborers on farms.

The A.F. of L. began to broaden its campaign during the thirties, by organizing unions of skilled fruit and vegetable packers in Salinas and

²New York Times, January 20, 1935.

the Imperial Valley, which furnished the opening wedge for a later drive among other agricultural and allied workers.

An independent union, composed exclusively of melon packers in the Imperial Valley, had been formed and incorporated as the Fruit and Vegetable Packers' Association in 1931. It had grown rapidly after winning a sit-down strike during the 1931 cantaloup season, and at its peak claimed well over 1,000 members, many of whom migrated seasonally from California to Arizona, Oregon, and Washington. It failed in a strike in the 1932 season, and the shippers were reported to have broken the union by importing large numbers of strikebreakers, most of whom were Japanese.³

The Salinas Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union Local 18016⁴ meanwhile had been reorganized and rechartered as the Vegetable Packers Association, or V.P.A., Local No. 18211. It was given State-wide jurisdiction over all vegetable-packing workers, in the first charter of its kind granted by the A.F. of L. Under a "floating charter" arrangement its offices could be transferred to various centers, following the main body of union members in their seasonal migrations. The association maintained its headquarters in Salinas during 8 months of the year, and in El Centro in the Imperial Valley during the remaining 4 months of winter and early spring. Branches or sublocals were organized in several localities, as among fruit packers in San Jose and vegetable packers in the Santa Maria Valley.

Local No. 18211 (the V.P.A.) conducted an 11-day strike in Salinas during the fall of 1933, while the C.&A.W.I.U. drive among the field workers of California was reaching its height. Continuous wage cutting had reduced earnings in the packing industry to the lowest levels reached for many years. The union struck for wage increases to 75 cents per hour for packers, equal pay for other men and women employees at a minimum scale of 50 cents per hour, and certain improvements in working conditions. The strike was settled with compromise wage increases to 70 cents per hour for packers and minimum wages for other employees of 45 cents per hour for men and 40 cents for women. Joe Casey, West Coast representative of the A.F. of L., together with George Creel, Conciliation Commissioner of the U. S. Department of Labor, persuaded the strikers to return to work on the promise that 90 percent of them would be reemployed and that wages would be arbitrated by an impartial body.⁵

Cooperation with Organized Filipinos

The A.F. of L.'s first experiments in cooperating with nonwhite organizations for collective bargaining in agriculture met with mixed success. The general strike of field and shed workers in the Salinas lettuce area during the fall of 1934⁶ was in one sense a setback. By withdrawing from the strike, the members of V.P.A. were awarded improved working conditions, shorter hours, and higher wages: 75 cents per hour for packers, 50 cents per hour for men trimmers, and 45 cents

³Brawley News, April 21, 1932; May 20, 1932; May 26, 1932. See also A. ("Shorty") Alston: A Brief History of the Fruit and Vegetable Industry of the Pacific Coast (pp. 6-7), (unpublished manuscript, Simon J. Lubin Society, San Francisco, Calif., 1938).

⁴See Chapter VII (pp. 78-79).

⁵Alston, *op. cit.* (p. 9).

⁶See Chapter IX (pp. 129-130).

for women.⁷ In leaving the Filipino union members unprotected and subject to attack from vigilantes, however, the organized white shed workers had lost the good will of nonwhite field workers and reduced the chances of winning sympathetic strike support from them in the future. Whether V.P.A.'s action was motivated by race prejudice or by expediency is not recorded.

Cooperative strike action between organized whites and nonwhites was more successful in another locality, later in the year. A branch of the Vegetable Packers Association in the Santa Maria Valley of Santa Barbara County participated with local unions of Mexicans and Filipinos in a joint strike of several thousand workers in the vegetable industry. The unions voted to allow arbitration of their demands, and all three groups won signed agreements granting union recognition and improvements in wages and working conditions. For several years thereafter they continued this cooperation in their collective bargaining with local grower-shippers under arbitration agreements.⁸

Imperial Valley Strike, 1935

Vegetable Packers Association No. 18211, as a separate union of processing workers, had won substantial gains for its members during 1934. Later, however, it lost several large and important strikes through its failure to win the organized support of the field workers.

The first defeat was suffered early in 1935. When union officers and members migrated to the Imperial Valley to pack and ship vegetables in the "fall deal," they attempted through collective bargaining to establish the wage standards which they had won by arbitration award in Monterey County. Grower-shippers refused to negotiate with the union, despite the mediation efforts of U. S. Conciliation Commissioner Fitzgerald. Finally the union drafted a set of demands for union wage scales and working conditions, and served an ultimatum on the employers. Within a week 8 grower-shippers signed an agreement meeting the demands, and the union declared a strike against the 52 who refused.⁹

The strike involved some 1,500-2,000 shed workers and was financed through a levy on union members in other areas. A fund of \$7,000 was raised to provide soup kitchens for such packing centers as Brawley, El Centro, Holtville, and Calexico. Both sides allegedly used considerable violence and intimidation during the strike. Two union members were shot to death while picketing one plant. Joseph Casey, west coast representative of the A.F. of L., blamed this incident on "unrestrained deputizing and arming of strikebreakers."¹⁰ In his official report to William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, Mr. Casey condemned State and local police in strong terms:

* * * a crew of irresponsible and unknown morons was prevailed upon to break the strike with the law-enforcing bodies arming them with pick handles, pistols, and deputies' badges. This unnecessary and promiscuous deputizing of nonresident strikebreakers finally resulted in the uncalled-for and cold-blooded murder of two striking

⁷Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 55: California State Chamber of Commerce—Origin of the Associated Farmers of California, Inc. (p. 20195).

⁸Field and shed workers as well as truck drivers again united in a small strike on a potato ranch. The strikers demanded 45 cents per hour for field labor and 50 cents per hour for shed workers, but apparently failed to win these gains. (Rural Worker, Vol. 1, No. 2, September 1935, p. 1.)

⁹Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 55 (p. 20195).

¹⁰Idem (p. 20198).

pickets. Next we find the State of California shamefully aiding and abetting this land of terroristic vigilantism and fascism by sending in police from the State Highway Patrol. The attitude of these "cossacks" was so bitterly biased that union strikers were hunted from the public streets like dogs. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 55, p. 20199.)

Shed owners and local law-enforcement authorities, on the other hand, alleged that violent methods were necessary in the face of intimidation and threatened violence from the strikers. A grand jury concluded that the shooting of the two strikers had occurred in self-defense, and refused to return indictments.¹¹ The strike ended within a few weeks with heavy losses to the union. It won none of its demands, and less than a third of the strikers were rehired.¹²

Miscellaneous Strikes, 1935-36

The Salinas shed packers' organization, renamed the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union No. 18211, won several union gains and extended its influence throughout California during 1935-36. The contracts which had been won by organized shed workers after the strikes of 1934 in the Salinas-Watsonville and Santa Maria districts, were renewed for another year. Delegates from the Imperial Valley, Salinas-Watsonville, and Santa Maria districts attended the union's second annual conference early in 1936, where they made plans to win signed union contracts in other crops besides lettuce, and to organize other workers besides those in the packing industry.¹³

The F.V.W.U. met with some success in organizing scattered groups of workers employed at packing such crops as pears, peaches, and small fruits throughout California. Some 12 small strikes were called by union members during 1935 and 1936. Most of these occurred in newly organized districts and only a few were reported in the newspapers. A 2-day strike of 165 members employed at packing pears in Santa Clara County won wage increases. Union spokesmen claimed that fiery crosses were burned at night in the vicinity of San Jose in order to intimidate the strikers.¹⁴ Compromise wage gains were won during August by 100 fruit packers striking for a 10 to 33 percent wage increase at the Fruit Growers Association sheds at Placerville,¹⁵ and by 140 fruit packers in a 10-day strike in another town in El Dorado County.¹⁶

Salinas Strikes of 1936

The Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union suffered its severest defeat in the famous Salinas lettuce strike during the fall of 1936. The organization never fully recovered after the loss of this large and prolonged struggle, one of the most violent in the history of agricultural labor in California.

Trouble in the Salinas area began with a small strike carried out by F.V.W.U. No. 18211 in May 1936. Union members in one plant walked out in protest against the employment of four "Imperial Valley scabs" on the crew. When the management sent the lettuce to another company

¹¹Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 55 (p. 20199).

¹²A. ("Shorty") Alston: *A Brief History of the Fruit and Vegetable Industry of the Pacific Coast*, p. 14.

¹³*Rural Worker*, Vol. I, No. 7, March 1936 (p. 1).

¹⁴*Idem*, Vol. I, No. 14, September 1936, (p. 4).

¹⁵*Sacramento Union*, August 16, 1936.

¹⁶Josiah C. Folsom: *Labor Disputes in Agriculture, 1927 to 1928* (unpublished).

to be packed, the crew in the second plant also struck, refusing to handle the "hot lettuce." The strike grew in this manner until operations at four plants were at a standstill for 10 days. It was settled by an arbitration board which included among its members a conciliator from the U.S. Department of Labor, and 12 "scabs" altogether were dismissed.¹⁷

The Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association, together with the revitalized Associated Farmers of California, made elaborate preparations to break the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union when its industry-wide contract came up for renewal in September. The two organizations engaged a public relations counsel, primarily to organize a "citizen's association," and hired private detectives and investigators to supplement the functions of local and State police.¹⁸

A strike developed when negotiations over the union contract failed to bring agreement. Representatives of the union and organized grower-shippers came to a deadlock over clause 39, which guaranteed preferential hiring of union members. To the employers this was "an effort of the union and a radical minority to set up a closed shop"¹⁹ and was therefore unacceptable.

The Associated Farmers gave its full support to the grower-shippers in Salinas. This organization had been revived in full force earlier in the year, in southern California, to combat renewed unionism and strike activity among Mexican field laborers. The threat of a State-wide A.F. of L. organizing campaign stimulated its reorganization on a larger and stronger basis, and brought considerable financial and moral support from important urban business interests. Organized agricultural employers saw a strong identity of interest between farmers and packing-shed owners, and for this reason supported the grower-shippers in Salinas. The Associated Farmers' official journal, *From Apathy to Action*, warned its subscribers in its October 6, 1936, issue that—

* * * should the strikers win and succeed in "unionizing" farm labor in the Salinas Valley, it would be but a step towards the same efforts in other areas of California * * * grapes, cotton, peaches, peas, grain, hay and all crops included.

* * * Although they pay the highest prices in the world for agricultural labor, California farmers would be told definitely whom they could hire and whom not—and whether they could harvest their crops at all or not.

The embattled employers and their allies displayed an extremely strong and well-organized opposition that finally defeated the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union. Individual members of the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association were held strictly in line; one company which attempted to make a separate agreement with the union was boycotted and was unable to obtain ice, paper, boxes, and other equipment necessary for packing and shipping lettuce.

Organized labor throughout the State supported the strike and placed bans on "hot lettuce."²⁰ Left-wing organizers in the Filipino Labor Union Incorporated made unsuccessful attempts to bring the lettuce-field workers in the Salinas area out on a sympathetic strike, but most of these workers were Filipinos and only a few were organized. The more nationalistic union members opposed these efforts, and the organizers faced an unenthusiastic group of workers who had been somewhat disillusioned by

¹⁷National Labor Relations Board, Report of Cases 178-178ee, Washington, July 14, 1939; *Rural Worker*, Vol. I, No. 11, June 1936.

¹⁸National Labor Relations Board, Report of Cases 178-178ee, Washington, July 14, 1939 (p. 1-20).

¹⁹From *Apathy to Action*, Bulletin 26, October 6, 1936 (p. 1).

²⁰*Rural Worker*, Vol. 1, No. 14, October 1936.

their experiences in the strike of 1934. A split ensued within the Filipino organization, and the left-wing faction withdrew to form the separate Filipino Labor Union. Representatives of the latter organization by late September claimed to have brought 500 field workers out on strike in sympathy with the white shed workers, but the number was insufficient to affect the outcome of the struggle. Further agitation was checked when Rufus Conate, president, and Chris Mensalves, secretary, of the Filipino Labor Union were arrested for "vagrancy."²¹

The strike at times approached the scale of a local civil war, with some 4,000 organized lettuce packers, teamsters, and their sympathizers facing armed State and city police, vigilantes, and imported strikebreakers. Violence and intimidation to an unusual degree were directed against strikers. The official report by the National Labor Relations Board stated that "the impression of these events obtained from the record is one of inexcusable police brutality, in many instances bordering on sadism."²²

The strike was finally terminated, after 6 weeks, by a vote of 613 to 342 among the strikers. Edward Vandeleur, secretary of the California State Federation of Labor, together with officers of the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union No. 18211, negotiated the terms of settlement with representatives of the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association.

Field Workers' Unions in the A.F. of L.

The serious defeats suffered by the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union No. 18211 in the Imperial Valley strike of 1935 and the Salinas strike of 1936 demonstrated the weaknesses of an organization restricted to white workers employed in processing industries only. The union had encountered an extraordinarily well-organized and violent opposition, but this was not the major reason for losing the strikes. It was to be found, rather, in the union's failure to organize the unskilled and semi-skilled nonwhite field laborers employed in harvesting crops owned or controlled by grower-shippers. In the last analysis both strikes had been broken by the almost uninterrupted flow of produce from field to shed, where it was packed by imported strikebreakers protected by hundreds of heavily armed deputies and police.

Complete "vertical" unions were necessary if workers of all occupations in agriculture were to wield a degree of bargaining power equal to that of employers. Large agricultural industries had become highly integrated, technologically and financially. Unions had to be organized on an industry-wide or State-wide scale to cope with business enterprises and employers' associations whose operations covered a broad territory. The California Federation of Labor and its affiliates organized in food-processing industries consequently were impelled to make an effort to unionize seasonal and migratory agricultural workers in the State.

An interest in affiliation with the A.F. of L. was growing among organized field workers. Left-wing unionists and representatives of the National Committee to Aid Agricultural Workers were taking steps to unite local farm-labor unions and to bring them into close working relationships with the organized employees of allied processing industries.

²¹San Francisco Examiner, September 24 and 28, 1936; Voice of Federation (California State Federation of Labor, San Francisco), September 24, 1936.

²²National Labor Relations Board, Report of Cases, 178-178ee, Washington, July 14, 1939 (p. 20).

Donald Henderson, president of the National Committee, stressed the importance of processing workers as a core of relatively well-paid and regularly employed labor within agricultural unions; they would provide greater stability of membership and income and serve as an important contact with urban trade-unions. The Salinas Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union No. 18211 he considered to be of strategic importance:

Its membership is largely composed of American workers nearly half of whom are former "Dust Bowl" farmers from Oklahoma and Texas. While many of the wives of these workers are employed in the industry, large numbers of the women also work in the restaurants and other shops in lettuce and fruit centers. Wherever they are, they unionize their shop.

Equally important in realizing the key position which this union holds is the fact that their jobs are semiskilled, fairly regular the year round, and wages are a great deal higher in the sheds than in the fields. These factors are of importance to the building of a stable, financially capable and permanent trade-union. (*Rural Worker*, Vol. I, No. 15, October 1936, p. 2.)

Farm workers in California during 1936 were in a temporarily strategic position to improve their economic status by collective bargaining. A comparative labor shortage existed in many crop areas, as various groups were withdrawn from agricultural work. Mexicans had been deported or repatriated in large numbers, and many resident workers were being reemployed in better-paid nonagricultural occupations during a period of general business recovery. The less successful could obtain relief from the Works Progress Administration and the California State Relief Administration. "Dust Bowl" refugees from the rural Middle West and Southwest had not yet arrived in such numbers as to compensate for all withdrawals from agricultural work. Wage rates throughout California's agriculture consequently tended to rise during 1936. Efforts to increase the labor supply by cutting relief rolls merely stimulated farm workers and unemployed to unionize and cooperate more closely among themselves. Affiliation with the A.F. of L. now carried still greater appeal, as it held out the prospect of support from well-organized and politically powerful State and county union affiliates of the State Federation of Labor.

The A.F. of L.'s earlier efforts to organize field workers in competition with the C.&A.W.I.U. in 1934 had been unsuccessful. Attempts to win Mexican citrus workers in Redlands to a branch of the V.P.A., and later to local Federal Labor Union No. 19060,²³ had soon failed. Cannery Workers Union No. 18893, which had wrested control from the C. &A.W.I.U. in the strike of apricot workers in Contra Costa County, suffered a defeat.²⁴

A.F. of L. unions of agricultural workers grew rapidly after the C.&A.W.I.U. had been abolished and left-wing organizers had abandoned their former policy of opposition. The National Committee for Unity of Agricultural Workers enlisted the support of organized labor and other sympathetic bodies to build local farm-labor unions; where possible these were chartered by the A.F. of L. and affiliated to central labor councils of nearby towns and counties. Federal labor unions, organized in many cases from local spontaneous strikes, grew side by side with independent racial unions of Mexicans and Filipinos. By September 1935, there were 16 such A.F. of L. local organizations of field, cannery, and packing-house workers in California.²⁵ Of this number, 4 were field workers' unions chartered in Portersville, Delano, Visalia, and

²³Daily Press (Riverside), March 1, 1934.

²⁴See Chapter VIII (p. 112).

²⁵Unpublished List prepared by U. S. Resettlement Administration, Washington, April 24, 1935.

Tulare, and charters were pending for local unions organized in the towns of Arvin, Fresno, San Jose, and San Diego.²⁶

Unions occupying key positions in the transportation industries of California furnished additional momentum to the A.F. of L.'s organizing campaign in agriculture. Labor organizations composing the Maritime Federation of the Pacific pushed unionism almost literally to the very doors of growers and shippers. Following the San Francisco general strike, unions were organized among bargemen and warehousemen on inland-waterway towns as well as in coastal ports. Both these groups handled crops harvested by field workers and later processed by canning and packing workers. Often the same companies employed both agricultural and transportation workers. The Maritime Federation's "march inland" thus provided an ever-widening base for the A.F. of L.'s program of organizing the canning and packing industries. At the same time such unionization was necessary if the Maritime Federation was to maintain and consolidate its gains.²⁷

The "march inland" stimulated the Brotherhood of Teamsters, mainstay of A.F. of L. strength on the Pacific Coast, to launch a counterdrive to "organize everything on wheels." To maintain its own proportional strength within the State Federation and constituent central labor councils, the Brotherhood was forced to extend its jurisdiction to agricultural processing industries such as a creameries and dairies, vegetable-packing sheds, canneries, and fruit- and nut-packing plants. Unions in these industries, to be fully effective, required, in turn, a supporting base of organized field laborers.

The competing aims of these two transport unions caused increasingly bitter jurisdictional disputes and internecine friction within the California State Federation of Labor. There were unprecedented organizational gains, nevertheless, for labor in agriculture and allied industries.

The most stable and militant local unions of field and processing workers were organized in the vicinities of key transportation centers for agricultural products. In such cities as Oakland, Stockton, Sacramento, San Jose, and Bakersfield, pressure from the teamsters and longshoremen forced the central labor councils to support agricultural workers' organizations. From these centers, organizers formed additional locals and branches in other sections of their counties.

The Central Labor Council of Santa Clara County in October 1935 passed a resolution to organize a Committee for Agricultural Organization, which would enlist unified support for local farm-labor unions. The committee was finally formed early in February 1937, shortly after Cannery Workers Union No. 20325 of San Jose had received its charter from the A.F. of L.²⁸ Since the majority of agricultural workers in this area were migratory, the organizing campaign was designed primarily to establish a union that could raise and standardize wage scales over the entire county. Such an organization was felt to be particularly necessary in view of the steadily increasing job competition from newly arrived "Dust Bowl" refugees from the Southwest.²⁹

The Santa Clara Central Labor Council and the San Jose Cannery Union cooperated with the newly organized Agricultural Workers Union

²⁶Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 1, August 1935 (p. 3).

²⁷Idem, Vol. I, No. 15, October 1936 (p. 2).

²⁸Sacramento Valley Union Labor Bulletin (Northern California Agricultural and Cannery Conference, Sacramento), February 2, 1937.

²⁹See footnote, p. 143.

No. 20221 of Stockton in unionizing field workers involved in numerous spontaneous strikes. The unions negotiated wage increases of from 22½ to 30 cents per hour for Mexican grape trimmers in the vicinity of Los Gatos, for spinach cutters in Milpitas, and for cherry pickers in Mount View.²⁹ A local farm-labor union was organized and chartered in May 1937, as Field Workers Union No. 20686, which succeeded in signing unusually favorable agreements with growers in field and orchard crops. The union asserted it had won closed shops on some farms, and union representatives were entitled to inspect companies' books to see that all employees were union members. A schedule of wages was reported established at a minimum of 50 cents per hour for an 8-hour day and 60 cents per hour for overtime, 60 and 70 cents per hour for tractor-drivers and irrigators, and 75 cents to \$1 for sprayers.³⁰

Agricultural Workers Union No. 20289 of Kern County began on a modest scale in Bakersfield early in 1936. By November it claimed only 85 members, though 1,000 Filipinos promised to join as soon as 100 white workers were enlisted. It expanded rapidly during the early part of 1937, establishing branches in such communities as Delano, Wasco, Shafter, McFarland, and Arvin, and by April it claimed a membership of several hundred whites and more than 1,000 resident Filipinos. It planned to require the seasonal influx of 4,000 to 5,000 additional Filipino workers to present union cards from other organizations or to join the county organization, before permitting them to work.³¹

Agricultural Workers Union No. 20221 was organized among Filipino field laborers in the Stockton area late in 1936. Its first strike was a failure. In concert with Agricultural Workers Union No. 20241 of Sacramento, it organized the Filipino celery workers and announced as its objectives a general 10-cent increase in hourly wage rates, union recognition, and a hiring hall for local farm workers.³² A strike was called on November 25, after grower-shippers had refused to negotiate. Though union spokesmen maintained that some 3,500 celery workers responded, the movement soon collapsed and the union won none of its demands.³³

Spokesmen for the grower-shippers charged that the union was a "racket" for collecting membership fees as high as \$25 from Filipinos, and could not be an effective collective-bargaining unit.³⁴ Will Hutchinson, spokesman of the newly organized Celery Growers and Shippers Association, asserted that no white men except the business agent had joined the organization and that no effort was being made to enlist other than Filipino members.³⁵

Union spokesmen, on the other hand, blamed the failure of the strike on the "excessively close" cooperation of State and county police officers with the grower-shipper interests. County Sheriff Odell, it was charged, barricaded the public highway against pickets 6 miles from the main packing sheds, and provided heavily armed convoys for trucks loaded with "hot celery" and strikebreakers. When peaceful pickets attempted to call out workers in sheds near Isleton, 11 were reported arrested for "trespassing on cultivated ground."³⁶

²⁹Farmer-Labor News (Central Labor Council of San Joaquin County, Modesto), May 7, 1937.

³⁰Idem, May 28, 1937.

³¹Idem, April 23, 1937. Previously the union had complained that several strikes undertaken in late 1936 were rendered ineffective by the continuous influx of migratory workers from other counties. (Letter to the Simon J. Lubin Society, San Francisco, Nov. 22, 1936.)

³²Western Worker, November 23, 1936.

³³San Francisco Examiner, November 24, 1936.

³⁴Pacific Rural Press, November 26, 1936.

³⁵Idem, November 25, 1936.

³⁶Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 1, January 1937 (p. 2).

Agricultural Workers Union No. 20241 of Sacramento County was first organized and chartered in May 1936 among a group of laborers in Knights Landing. Later it transferred its headquarters to the city of Sacramento and joined the Federated Trades Council.³⁷ With the assistance of organizers from the Stockton Local No. 20221 and the Sacramento local of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union, it established branches in Hollister, Brentwood, Riverbank, and Chowchilla. The Chowchilla branch in May 1937 was chartered separately as Federal Labor Union No. 20675 of agricultural workers.³⁸ Later it won a written agreement with organized asparagus growers in the Walnut Grove area.³⁹

Another local organization of agricultural workers in Yuba and Sutter Counties was chartered as a federal labor union during May 1937. The union's executive board sought to negotiate with growers for a standard wage of 35 cents per hour throughout the peach-growing area during the summer harvest season.⁴⁰

Filipino and Mexican farm workers' unions in several crop areas became affiliated to the A.F. of L. early in 1937. American, Mexican, and Filipino agricultural workers in Santa Maria Valley, who had cooperated remarkably well for several years in separate organizations, received an A.F. of L. charter in February 1937, as Field Workers Union Local No. 20326. Local union representatives insisted that workers of all races be accepted without discrimination.⁴¹

The transition was not always this smooth. In the spring of 1937 a majority of the members in a local branch of the Confederacion de Uniones de Campesinas y Obreras Mexicanas in Orange County withdrew to join a new A.F. of L. Farm Laborers Union No. 20688. The C.U.C.O.M. local continued, however, retaining enough of its membership to create considerable jurisdictional trouble the following year.⁴²

The question of affiliation with the A.F. of L. also was one cause of the split that occurred in the Filipino Labor Union Incorporated, and led to the establishment of the separate unincorporated Filipino Labor Union already noted.⁴³ Early in 1937 the Lompoc, Salinas, and San Luis Obispo County branches of the latter organization voted to affiliate with the A.F. of L. and seek federal labor union charters.⁴⁴

State-wide Federation of Agricultural Workers

While local unions were being established throughout California, labor organizers were attempting to federate local organizations of all types into one State-wide union covering agriculture and allied industries. The support of the organized teamsters and longshoremen was vital in this campaign. Nevertheless it brought to a head the growing conflict between these two groups within the California State Federation of Labor and resulted finally in the secession of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific.

³⁷Farmer-Labor News, June 4, 1937.

³⁸Idem, May 21, 1937.

³⁹Sacramento Valley Union Labor Bulletin (Sacramento), February 3, 1937.

⁴⁰Sacramento Bee, May 24, 1937.

⁴¹Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 2, February 1937.

⁴²Field notes.

⁴³See Chapter IX (p. 131).

⁴⁴Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 3, March 1937 (p. 5).

The Federation of Agricultural Workers Unions formed in Los Angeles in January 1936⁴⁵ was the beginning of a State-wide union in agricultural industries. The Coordinating Council of Agricultural and Packing Workers of California was established shortly afterward to enlist the support of the more strategically located central labor councils in the State. This body published a semiweekly farmer-labor newspaper as a means of promoting "trade-union education" and providing workers with information regarding crops, prices, and wage and hour conditions. The Coordinating Council depended upon the general organizer of the A.F. of L. for support in obtaining federal labor union charters when opposition was encountered from officials of local central labor councils.⁴⁶

An unofficial California Conference of Agricultural Workers, attended by representatives from A.F. of L. affiliates and independent Mexican and Filipino unions, was held in Stockton during June 6 and 7, 1936. Delegates passed resolutions endorsing the establishment of a State Federation of Agricultural, Cannery and Packing Workers, and calling for a standard \$3 per 8-hour day with overtime pay for seasonal farm workers, and \$65 per month with board for year-round employees.⁴⁷

The conference was not officially recognized by the California State Federation of Labor. However, a few months later the strike of Salinas lettuce-shed workers in the fall of 1936 focused attention on the desirability of organizing field laborers to cooperate with unions of processing workers. The State federation at its annual convention in November 1936 passed a resolution endorsing the demands of the Stockton conference for a State-wide charter for labor in agriculture and allied industries. A 1-cent monthly per capita tax was levied on all State federation members to finance an organizing campaign.⁴⁸ The text of the resolution read as follows:

Whereas, agriculture, the largest industry in the State, is still unorganized, and its peculiar make-up necessitates special consideration on the part of the State Federation to organize, and

Whereas, agriculture is State-wide in scope, and is seasonal and localized by crops, and compels the bulk of its workers to migrate, covering the entire State and sometimes adjacent States, during a season of 8 or 9 months, and

Whereas, the workers engaged in agriculture and its numerous branches require little or no skill, Therefore be it

Resolved, That the State Federation of Labor assembled in convention at Sacramento, September 1936, petition the American Federation of Labor to grant an international charter for agriculture covering all workers in the production of farm products and the processes of manufacturing of a consumable product; and further be it

Resolved, That pending the establishment of an international union a State-wide federal charter be asked for California to cover all field workers engaged in agriculture.⁴⁸

The State Federation of Labor in February 1937 officially endorsed and sponsored a State-wide conference of agricultural workers in San Francisco. Accredited delegates represented 14 local or federal labor unions chartered by the A.F. of L., 15 locals of the Mexican C.U.C.O.M., 4 branches of the Filipino Labor Union, and the newly organized Japanese Agricultural Workers Association of Southern California.⁴⁹

⁴⁵See Chapter IX (p. 124).

⁴⁶Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 14, September 1936 (p. 4).

⁴⁷Idem, Vol. I, No. 12, July 1936 (p. 1).

⁴⁸Idem, Vol. I, No. 16 (p. 1).

⁴⁹Official Roster of Delegates, State Conference of Agricultural Unions, San Francisco, February 27, 1937 (Minutes of California State Federation of Labor, Feb. 27).

The State federation in a special bulletin expressed its concern over the growing strength of the Associated Farmers and other anti-union forces in the State and indicated the main objective:

Because of many serious and acute problems and the strong organized opposition that confronts the agricultural workers of this State in their attempts to organize and better their low economic and social conditions, it is imperative that there be established one State-wide organization with a uniform program with no conflict in jurisdiction between local unions. (Call for Conference of Agricultural Workers, California State Federation of Labor, San Francisco, February 1937.)

The delegates approved a proposal for chartering a State-wide organization that would absorb all existing field and cannery workers' unions. Under the proposed plan, all existing federal labor union charters were to be surrendered, and the new organization was to issue cards to workers for general use in agriculture and allied industries in the State. All cannery and field labor unions, whether A.F. of L. or independent, would be affiliated to the new federation, a branch of which would be established in each central labor union territory. By referendum vote, workers in each county would elect one representative to a State executive committee, which would be the responsible governing body for the State organization. Each local branch would elect a suborganizer.⁵⁰ Meanwhile a temporary Agricultural and Cannery Workers Union was formed, and George Woolf, president of the Alaska Cannery Workers Union No. 20195, and part-time organizer of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union under Harry Bridges, was elected president.

It was further proposed at the conference that the State federation provide a fund of \$20,000 for the new union, to finance its projected organizational campaign. Another resolution was passed requesting that half of the money raised by the 1-cent monthly per capita tax, levied on all members of the State federation by the convention in September, be allotted to the new organization.⁵¹ A committee was appointed to present these resolutions to the executive council of the California State Federation of Labor.

At the meeting held at Sacramento in March 1937, the executive council refused these requests on the ground that, if it had to provide the funds to finance an organizing campaign in agriculture, it should have direct control over any new State-wide union. It ruled further that field and processing workers should be organized in separate State-wide unions rather than in one integrated organization, because the existing federal labor unions of the A.F. of L. already were under contract to their employers.⁵¹ Walter Cowan, vice president of the California State Federation of Labor, was appointed temporary secretary of the proposed union and was given the power to appoint organizers and control the allocation of funds.

George Woolf and other representatives elected at the San Francisco conference denounced the State federation's stand. They were supported by Harry Bridges, president of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen, Walter Mahaffey, president of the Central Labor Council of Stockton, and other important urban union officials.⁵² Bridges charged that the State federation officialdom was trying to "build up its own political set-up" so as to allow no control in the hands of the local unions

⁵⁰Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 2, February 1937 (p. 5).

⁵¹Official Report of Proceedings before the National Labor Relations Board, Cases No. XX-CO362 to 377, *Bercut Richards and California Processors and Growers v. U.C.A.P.A.W.A.*, Oakland, June 1938 (pp. 10744-10746); Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 5, May 1937.

⁵²See footnote, p. 147.

themselves.⁵² Woolf and his supporters threatened indirectly to secede from the federation:

* * * the more than 200,000 workers in field, shed and canneries in California should be organized into one union which would elect its officers and control its affairs democratically. The time is ripe for such an organization, and something will be done whether we operate under C.I.O. or form an independent group. (*Rural Worker*, Vol. II, No. 4, April 1937, p. 4.)

The insurgents called another convention of agricultural field and processing workers in April. Delegates from 18 federal labor unions and independent organizations, claiming to represent a total membership of 15,000, met in Bakersfield and established the California Federation of Agricultural and Cannery Unions. The executive board elected to direct this organization represented the left-wing element in the agricultural labor movement including George Woolf; Dudley Sargent, secretary of Agricultural Workers Union No. 20221 of Stockton; Marcella Ryan, organizer of Cannery Workers Union 20099 of Oakland; C. W. Johnson, organizer of Agricultural Workers Union No. 20289 of Bakersfield; C. D. Mensalves, secretary, Filipino Labor Union; and Bernard Lucero, secretary, Mexican Confederation of Agricultural Workers.⁵³

Organized grower-shippers found the State Federation of Labor's proposed organizing campaign in agriculture highly disturbing. The Associated Farmers of California had regarded with suspicion the Conference of Agricultural Workers held in Stockton in June 1936 and claimed that it was dominated by radicals and had received little support from recognized labor unions.⁵⁴ A few months later, however, this farm organization had fought the strike called by the recognized A.F. of L. shed workers' union in Salinas. The appointment of Walter Cowan and Fred West as A.F. of L. organizers for farm labor brought the comment from the Associated Farmers' bulletin that—

* * * assuredly they constitute a good pair, fully qualified because of their experience with restaurant workers and window cleaners to tell the farmers of California how they should conduct their business. (From *Apathy to Action*, Bulletin No. 33, January 5, 1937.)

The split between right- and left-wing elements within the California State Federation of Labor caused even more consternation among organized grower-employers. As between the conservatives led by Edward Vandeleur (secretary of the State federation) and the Brotherhood of Teamsters on one side, and the International Longshoremens and Warehousemen led by Harry Bridges on the other, agricultural interests favored the former. They charged Bridges with being "dominated by C.I.O. leanings and support of the Communists."⁵⁵ The Associated Farmers were particularly hostile to the I.L.W.U., as this union had been aggressive in pushing the campaign to organize agricultural field and processing workers. From *Apathy to Action* alleged that longshoremens had been sent to act as pickets in several agricultural-labor disputes, including the milk strike in Alameda, the lettuce strike in Salinas, and the celery strike in San Joaquin. "What lawful right these

⁵²Woolf and Bridges were supported by the officers of Agricultural Workers Union No. 20241 of Sacramento and No. 23228 of San Jose; Dried Fruit and Nut Workers No. 20020 of Alameda; the Employees Security Association of Fresno; the Filipino Labor Association of Knights Landing; Agricultural Workers Union No. 20221 of Stockton; the Cannery Workers Union of Pittsburg; the Mexican Agricultural Workers Union of Los Alamitos; and the Central Labor Councils of Alameda, Contra Costa, Stanislas, and Santa Clara Counties and the cities of Vallejo and Bakersfield. (*San Francisco Chronicle*, Mar. 24, 1937.)

⁵³*Farmer-Labor News*, April 20, 1937; *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 26, 1937; *Rural Worker*, Vol. II, No. 5, May 1937 (p. 3).

⁵⁴From *Apathy to Action*, Bulletin No. 39, April 3, 1937.

⁵⁵*Idem*, Bulletin No. 41, May 4, 1937.

waterfront workers have to interfere with the harvesting of farm crops," the official organ of the Associated Farmers commented, "goes beyond human understanding."⁵⁶ As regards the Bakersfield conference in April, farm employers observed that—

* * * the apparent intention was to create a situation under which agricultural workers would be affiliated with the Longshoremen's union and be under the domination of the dictatorial alien, Harry Bridges. (From Apathy to Action, Bulletin No. 41, April 20, 1933.)

The Associated Farmers of California nevertheless was unwilling to accept organization of farm laborers at the hands of conservatives in the State Federation of Labor. Secretary Vandeleur, at a legislative committee hearing at Sacramento, expressed the view that farmers had either to consent to having their workers organized by the orthodox A.F. of L., or they would be unionized by the C.I.O. with the backing of Communists. The Associated Farmers dismissed this argument with the reply that "the A.F. of L. has not been able to keep Communists out of its older unions, and so it cannot guarantee that they would be barred from any farm-labor union."⁵⁷

The rift between unions within the State Federation of Labor was widening. The National Committee to Aid Agricultural Workers (formerly the National Committee for Unity of Agricultural Workers), backed by the executive of the C.I.O., was making preparations to hold a nationwide conference of local unions in order to establish a separate international organization of agricultural field and processing workers. The conflict within the California State Federation of Labor helped to speed events. George Woolf, president of the temporary Cannery and Agricultural Federation of California established at the Bakersfield conference, came out flatly in favor of an international chartered by the C.I.O. He claimed the complete backing of the maritime unions of the Pacific Coast, which at that time were voting to affiliate with the C.I.O.⁵⁸

Labor unionism in agriculture and allied industries of California seemed by late 1936 to hold promise of achieving a degree of strength and stability it had not hitherto attained. It had survived several serious strike defeats during 1936, and labor organizers were taking steps to unify all local unions on an integrated State-wide scale. Unlike the C.&A.W.I.U. during the early thirties, the A.F. of L. was organizing the better-paid and more regularly employed processing workers as well as field laborers. These groups, moreover, enjoyed the support of far more powerful urban labor unions than had the C.&A.W.I.U.

This support, however, had its negative aspects, from the point of view of farm-labor unionism. Leading urban industrial labor organizations drew agricultural workers into their jurisdictional disputes. Farm-labor unionism in California was disrupted within a few years when it became part of the general conflict between the American Federation of Labor and the Committee for Industrial Organization.

⁵⁶From Apathy to Action, Bulletin No. 33, January 5, 1937.

⁵⁷Idem, Bulletin No. 40, April 13, 1937.

⁵⁸Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 6, July 1937 (p. 3).

CHAPTER XI.—Inter-Union Conflict

Conflict between the two most powerful groups within the California State Federation of Labor came to a head in mid-1937. Unions in the Maritime Federation of the Pacific under Harry Bridges competed with affiliates of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters for control over industrial establishments that were dependent upon transportation by highway or waterway—warehouses, packing plants and canneries particularly. The executive council of the American Federation of Labor attempted to settle the dispute by handing jurisdiction over inland warehouses (which were presumed to be more immediately dependent upon highway transportation) to the teamsters.¹ The Maritime Federation seceded from the American Federation of Labor to join the Committee for Industrial Organization in 1937. Jurisdictional disputes between the two major transport unions then increased to major proportions. The conflict became general in the field of agriculture and allied industries, when the C.I.O. chartered a new international, the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (U.C.A.P.A.W.A.).

The organizing campaign among field laborers during 1937 was incidental to that carried out in processing industries related to agriculture. Unions won major gains in the wineries, dairies and creameries, vegetable-, fruit-, and nut-packing plants, and canneries of California. Agricultural employers considered these new unionizing drives as a prelude to an extensive union campaign among seasonal field laborers on farms. E. P. Loesch, leader of the State-wide agricultural committee of the California State Chamber of Commerce, summarized his views as follows:

As I see it, the big question in 1938 faced by farmers regarding organization of field workers is not what will take place in the field, but rather what degree of pressure will be brought from the unions in related industries.

There is every indication that the new C.I.O. leaders are going to attempt to extend their contracts to include all growers of vegetables and if possible the growers of citrus and walnuts and other crops. (Stockton Record, November 4, 1937.)

The American Federation of Labor, 1937-38

The Canning Industry

Inter-union conflict in agriculture and allied industries of California was concentrated in fruit and vegetable canning during 1937 and 1938. The largest and most violent strike of the year and, subsequently, the most important organization gains for unions, were experienced in this industry.

A major weakness of the campaign of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (C.&A.W.I.U.) during 1933 and 1934 had been its failure to organize the cannery workers. Communist labor organizers and their supporters began to pay more attention to this occupational group in 1935 and 1936, after the policy of dual unionism had been abandoned in favor of cooperation with the A.F. of L. In several of the larger northern and central California towns locals were

¹Report, NLRB Case No. XX-C-362-377 (pp. 72-86).

organized and given charters from the A.F. of L. as federal labor unions and were then affiliated to nearby central labor councils.

The first cannery workers' locals were organized in metropolitan San Francisco and Oakland, where the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union was expanding rapidly and growing in power following the general strike of 1934. In July 1935, 150 cannery employees at plants of the Santa Cruz Packing Co. and the California Packing Corp. joined in a sympathy strike with organized warehousemen who had been locked out.²

At about the same time some 350 workers belonging to the newly organized Dried Fruit and Nut Packers Federal Labor Union No. 20020 were involved in a 3-week strike in Oakland. Cannery Workers Union No. 20099 was formed in Alameda County during the fall of 1935 by Marcella Ryan, who had credentials from the Machinists Union, and was able to enlist the financial support of the Alameda Central Labor Council.³

Union activity among canneries in the Bay area gained greater momentum during the fall of 1936, as the State Federation of Labor began to take a more direct interest in the industry. A joint organizing campaign was conducted during November by Local No. 20099 and the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union among employees of the Filice & Perelli Co. in Richmond. A 3-week walk-out began when several union members were discharged, and lasted until the company agreed to rehire them. The union later charged the company with failing to live up to its agreement and attempting to promote a company union among its employees.⁴

A more serious strike over the issue of union recognition for Local No. 20099 occurred in the Heinz Co. plant at Emeryville (Alameda County) during January, February, and March, 1937. With the cooperation of the Alameda Central Labor Council and local unions of teamsters and warehousemen, the Cannery Workers Union was successful in forcing the company to negotiate. The Central Labor Council of Alameda put the company on the "We Don't Patronize" list, and its two warehouses were closed by sympathetic-strike action on the part of teamsters and warehousemen.⁵

The strike was continued and the cannery closed for almost 2 months while negotiations remained at a stalemate. Both sides sought allies in order to improve their position for collective bargaining. The Heinz Co. empowered the Cannery Workers' League, an organization composed of all canning companies in the district, to handle its labor relations. Cannery Workers Union No. 20099 and Warehousemen's Union Local No. 3844 meanwhile established a joint organizing committee to conduct a unionizing drive among workers in all East Bay canneries. The Warehousemen's Union cooperated with the Cannery Workers Union in preparing contracts to be submitted to the management in negotiations.⁶

The California Conserving Co. of Hayward (Alameda County) was the first cannery to be organized in the new drive. This company used

²Report, NLRB Case No. XX-C-362-367 (p. 2686).

Subsequently, the National Labor Relations Board ordered the Santa Cruz Co. of Oakland to cease discouraging its employees from joining unions, and to reinstate with pay some 31 workers who were discharged for joining Local 3844 of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union. (Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 10, May 1936, p. 4.)

³Report NLRB Case No. XX-C-362-377 (p. 2690).

⁴Idem (pp. 293 and 3786).

⁵Idem (p. 2704); Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 3, March 1937.

⁶Report, NLRB Case No. XX-C-362-377 (p. 2709); Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 4, April 1937.

anti-union tactics similar to those used by Filice & Perelli and the Heinz Co.—discriminatory discharge, adverse publicity, and fostering of company unions. In retaliation, picket lines were placed around four plants and the company was put on the “We Don’t Patronize” list of the A.F. of L.⁷

A committee of union members met with the attorney for the California Processors and Growers, a newly established organization of cannery operators, to negotiate the terms of settlement, and the strikes were finally ended with an agreement stating that all strikers would be reinstated without discrimination.

The most notable conflict during 1937 involved cannery workers in Stockton during April. In the course of an 8-day strike more than 60 participants were injured in battles in which tear gas, axe handles, shot-guns, and rocks were used.⁸ Conflict between the left-wing farm and cannery labor organizers and the executive board of the California State Federation of Labor came to a head during the settlement of the strike.

Agricultural Workers Union No. 20221 in March 1937 had been granted financial aid and personnel from the San Joaquin County Central Labor Council to organize cannery workers in Stockton.⁹

The Stockton local International longshoremen and warehousemen’s union gave sympathetic strike support by refusing to move “hot cans.”¹⁰ The strike began in one plant over the familiar issue of discriminatory discharge of union members. It spread rapidly and soon included several hundred employees of the four major canning companies in the city: Stockton Food Products, Packwell, Mor Pack, and Richmond-Chase. Agricultural Workers Union No. 20221 formulated the following schedule of demands, which included substantial wage increases and recognition as sole bargaining agency:

- (1) 62½ cents per hour for men, and 50 cents per hour for women;
- (2) 70 cents per hour for skilled workers;
- (3) 8-hour day and 6-day week;
- (4) Time and a half for Sunday and holiday work;
- (5) Agricultural Workers Union No. 20221 as sole bargaining agency.

When some 1,200 special deputies recruited by and from the ranks of the Associated Farmers attacked the picket lines with gunfire, the union threatened to call out the field workers on a sympathetic strike.¹⁰

The State Federation of Labor helped to finance a joint strategy committee which the Central Labor Council of San Joaquin County and the Federated Trades Council of Sacramento together had established to carry on negotiations for settling the strike. The canning companies refused to accept Agricultural Workers Union No. 20221 as bargaining agent, on the ground that it did not represent the cannery workers. The joint strategy committee consequently ordered the strikers to return to work pending negotiations. A new cannery workers union which excluded field laborers was organized at a mass meeting of strikers on

⁷Report, NLRB Case No. XX-C-362-377 (pp. 2704, 2716-2718, 3212).

⁸Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 50 (pp. 18242-18319).

⁹It had applied for jurisdiction over the cannery workers, and proceeded to organize them with the understanding that when the State Federation program for State-wide organization of cannery workers was under way, Local No. 20221 would have to surrender them. (Report, NLRB Case No. XX-C-362-377, p. 237.)

Previously, instructions had been issued to central labor councils by the State federation that no more charters were to be issued to agricultural or cannery workers’ unions until the plan for a State-wide organization had been completed. Thus when Local No. 20221 applied to the San Joaquin Central Labor Council for a cannery workers’ charter, it was refused. However, a resolution asking for authorization to organize cannery workers under the existing local charter was approved. (Idem, pp. 330-332.)

¹⁰Report, NLRB Case No. XX-C-362-377 (pp. 336-337).

April 25, and its newly issued charter as Federal Labor Union Local No. 20676 granted it jurisdiction over canneries in San Joaquin County.¹¹

A settlement was reached at a conference called by Governor Merriam on the following day, April 26; Cannery Workers Union Local No. 20676 was recognized as bargaining agent, and all details regarding wages, hours, and working conditions were deferred for later negotiations.¹² Secretary Vandeleur proposed a "master contract" to the employers' representatives, on the basis of which the State Federation of Labor would represent cannery workers in collective-bargaining relations.¹³ He justified the State federation's assumption of powers on the ground that the strike had involved illegal and unrecognized action on the part of Agricultural Workers Union Local No. 20221. Vandeleur asserted that the trouble had begun when the Central Labor Council granted unwarranted control over the organizing of cannery workers to the Stockton farm workers' local. He charged that the subsequent actions of those workers did not constitute a legally recognized strike, because "outside Delta agricultural workers" had placed a picket line around a cannery and closed it in order to force its employees into the union. He concluded that the State federation was justified in representing the cannery workers in collective-bargaining negotiations until such time as a new and separate union had been organized and chartered for them.¹⁴

The Stockton cannery strike served as a test case, a turning point in the California State federation's entire organization program in agriculture and allied industries. The victory of the conservative executive, under Vandeleur, over the left-wing faction supported by the International Longshoremens and Warehousemen's Union started a wholesale purge of all cannery unions and central labor councils suspected of being pro-C.I.O. or radical in sympathy. William Green, president of the A.F. of L., granted Edward Vandeleur the direct power to oust any established local leadership, to revoke existing cannery-union charters, and to issue new charters in their stead.¹⁴

Oakland Local No. 20099 came to an end in June 1937. Its charter was revoked on the grounds that it was not paying its dues, that its leadership was communistic, and that it was planning to join the C.I.O.¹⁵ In its place were chartered Cannery Workers Unions No. 20843 for South Alameda and No. 20905 for North Alameda.

Cannery Workers Union No. 20324 of Sacramento was similarly reorganized during the early summer of 1937. Like the other locals, it had been organized originally with the assistance of the Longshoremens and Warehousemen's Union. In June 1937, it conducted a strike against the California Packing Corp., a move which the Federated Trades Council had refused to sanction. The State federation executive under Secretary Vandeleur forced the union officers to resign on the charge of being

¹¹Report, NLRB Case No. XX-C-362-377 (pp. 7279, 7301, 8852).

¹²Farmer-Labor News, Vol. 14, No. 60, April 30, 1937.

¹³Report, NLRB Case No. XX-C-362-377 (pp. 8846-8860, 11034).

¹⁴Idem (pp. 10749-10814).

¹⁵In more detail, Mr. Vandeleur charged that Local No. 20099 refused to comply with the laws of the Alameda County Central Labor Council and the State federation, that it was not paying its dues to these bodies, and that it was preparing to join the C.I.O. He alleged that the officers controlling the union were not themselves cannery workers, but were "radicals" under the domination of Harry Bridges, president of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific, and George Woolf, allegedly Communist organizer of the Alaska Fish Cannery Workers Union. (Report, NLRB Case No. XX-C-362-377, pp. 10749-10814.)

"communistic," and threatened to revoke the union's charter if they refused. The union elected new officers, and Federated Trades Council officials appointed by the State federation negotiated a settlement of the strike with the cannery employers. The agreement they reached was submitted to the cannery-union membership, which voted to ratify it.¹⁶

Another important cannery workers' union, Local No. 20325 of Santa Clara County, underwent a change in control during this period. The Central Labor Council protested to A.F. of L. President William Green that the executive of the State federation had arbitrarily issued a new charter, No. 20852, without previous notice and without preferring charges against the officers of the existing organization.¹⁷ The members of Local No. 20325 were later transferred to the Dried Fruit and Nut Packers Union Local No. 20184, and voted to affiliate with the newly organized U.C.A.P.A.W.A. (C.I.O.). The organizing board of the Central Labor Council filed charges with the regional office of the National Labor Relations Board against several cannery employers of the county on the ground that they were forcing workers into Local No. 20852, newly chartered by the State federation. This latter, the council claimed, "functions more in the nature of a dues-collecting agency than as a trade-union."¹⁸

The State federation soon extended its control over the entire canning industry of northern California. The unionizing drive was accelerated in April; 18 organizers were placed in the field and they brought an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 cannery workers into the A.F. of L. within a few months. The Teamsters Union supported the drive by organizing several thousand truck drivers handling fruit going from fields to canneries and from canneries to ships and railways.¹⁹

The negotiations begun in settling the Stockton strike were broadened. The State federation executive bargained on an industry-wide basis with the California Processors and Growers, representing a score of the larger canneries. Finally, in July 1937, a blanket agreement was drawn up in contract form and signed by both parties. It granted closed shops and recognition as sole bargaining agency to 10 cannery unions, most of them newly organized and chartered, having jurisdiction over several counties:

No. 20905 of North Alameda
No. 20794 of Contra Costa
No. 20852 of Santa Clara
No. 20676 of San Joaquin
No. 21104 of Yuba-Sutter

No. 20843 of South Alameda
No. 20889 of Fresno and Kingsburg
No. 20592 of Stanislaus
No. 20324 of Sacramento
No. 20823 of Rio Vista

The number of cannery unions included under the master agreement had increased to 21 within a year and covered an estimated 50,000 to 60,000 workers.²⁰

A State Council of Agricultural and Cannery Workers, with Charles Real of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters as president, was established during the annual convention of the State Federation of Labor at Long Beach in September 1937. The State council at a meeting in Los Angeles on December 13, 1937, then instituted a tentative National Council of Agricultural and Cannery Workers as a counterbalance

¹⁶Report, NLRB Case No. XX-C-362-377 (pp. 5738, 5759-5764, 5780).

¹⁷Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 7, July 1937.

¹⁸Progress Report, Subcommittee of the organizing board, Central Labor Council of Santa Clara County, San Jose, September 20, 1937 (p. 1).

¹⁹Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 60 (p. 22059).

²⁰Report, NLRB Case No. XX-C-362-377 (pp. 10828-10829, 10934-10941).

to the C.I.O.'s new United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America, or U.C.A.P.A.W.A.²¹

The methods by which the State federation extended its control in order to exclude the C.I.O. had raised criticism in many quarters, including affiliates of the A.F. of L. itself. Cannery employers, as represented by the California Processors and Growers and other organizations, had indicated a decided preference for dealing with the conservative union bloc led by Vandeleur and the teamsters. This preference became more pronounced when the left-wing group, led by organized longshoremen and warehousemen under Harry Bridges, seceded from the federation to join the C.I.O. and at the same time organized the U.C.A.P.A.W.A.

Accusations of "selling out" and "promoting company unions" were directed against the State federation from many sides. The Farmer-Labor News, organ of the Central Labor Council of San Joaquin County, had suggested that there were "irregularities" in the settlement of the Stockton strike.²² An editorial entitled "Company Unions—1937 Style," voiced these charges:

The employers have taken full advantage of the A.F. of L.—C.I.O. rivalry that exists in the labor movement. They have appealed to the A.F. of L. leaders who, frightened by the spread of C.I.O. influence, became panic-stricken and have aided and abetted the extension of employer domination in A.F. of L. unions. Charters of unions organized by central labor bodies have been revoked and given over to unions that are obviously controlled by employers. (Farmer-Labor News, Vol. XV, No. 10, July 2, 1937, p. 3.)

Similar sentiments were expressed by bodies such as the Alameda Industrial Union Council (which represented unions suspended from the Central Labor Council by the State federation) and the Central Labor Council of Santa Clara County which had protested to William Green against the issuance of a new cannery-union charter without prior consultation.²³ The members of the new Santa Clara cannery union later refused to approve the uniform wage and hour provisions established in the State federation's blanket agreement with the California Processors and Growers.²⁴

The president of Sacramento Local No. 20324 filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board, claiming that cannery operators were using coercion and interfering with elections.²⁵ In Alameda County, special resentment was aroused during a series of strikes in the summer of 1937, when the Teamsters Union refused to recognize picket lines established by a C.I.O. cannery workers union around the Filice & Perelli plant at Richmond. Rowland Watson, an A.F. of L. organizer at the time, later testified before the NLRB that the State federation took over and chartered several company unions (in the form of employee associations) in plants of Filice & Perelli and other companies. A former member of Local No. 20099 employed in the Heinz plant at Emeryville asserted that the company had helped organize the newly chartered A.F. of L. Union No. 20905 and had circulated a petition among the employees urging them to withdraw from the old union and join the new one.²⁶

The new C.I.O. organization, U.C.A.P.A.W.A., finally filed formal charges with the National Labor Relations Board against canneries rep-

²¹Report, NLRB Case No. XX-C-362-377 (pp. 2404-2408).

²²Farmer-Labor News, Vol. XV, No. 8, June 18, 1937 (p. 8).

²³Idem, No. 11, July 9, 1937 (p. 3).

²⁴Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 7, July 1937 (p. 1).

²⁵Farmer-Labor News, Vol. XV, No. 9, June 25, 1937 (p. 5).

²⁶Report, NLRB Case No. XX-C-362-377 (pp. 2966, 9949).

resented by the California Processors and Growers. The chief allegation was that the organized cannery employers' master agreement with the State Federation of Labor and the methods by which the agreement was enforced constituted "company unionism" in violation of the Wagner Act. After more than a year of investigation and testimony at official hearings of the NLRB, the record was set aside and no judgment was rendered. This in itself would seem to justify the State federation's assertion that its cannery workers' organizations were bona-fide labor unions.²⁷

The State federation's National Council of Agricultural and Cannery Workers meanwhile was negotiating with the California Processors and Growers for a new contract to cover the more than 60,000 northern and central California fruit and vegetable cannery employees. The union announced early in February 1938 that it would seek a 20-percent wage increase and an 8-hour day, with time and a half for overtime up to 10 hours and double time thereafter.²⁸ No such gains were won, however, and the contract of the previous year was renewed. Secretary Vandeleur claimed that "harassing tactics" by the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. and the National Labor Relations Board, which began its investigations in April, had weakened the bargaining power of the cannery unions.²⁹

The Dairy Industry

Next to fruit and vegetable canning, the most impressive organization gains by the A.F. of L. in the field of agriculture and allied industries were made among dairies and creameries. The Brotherhood of Teamsters played a crucial role, becoming involved again in a three-sided conflict with the C.I.O. and the Associated Farmers of California.

The union campaign centered in the rural areas near San Francisco and Los Angeles, when the dairy industry was concentrated to a degree not found in other sections of the United States. Dairying, more than any other type of farming, had highly urbanized business relations. Because its product was very perishable, the various stages of producing, transporting, distributing, processing, and retailing were intimately related, and the industry was extremely dependent upon truck transportation. Dairy farms in the San Francisco and Los Angeles areas, moreover, had become specialized, large-scale, and industrialized,³⁰ with a factory pattern of labor relations that left them peculiarly vulnerable to

²⁷Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 60 (p. 22059).

²⁸The existing agreement, drawn up in 1937, provided for a base pay rate of 52½ cents per hour for men, 42½ cents per hour for women, and an 8-hour day. (San Jose Mercury Herald, Feb. 3, 1938.)

²⁹Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 60 (p. 22059).

³⁰Idem, Part 58 (pp. 21336-21338). Arthur W. Stuart, economist on the La Follette Committee, stated:

"The production of milk for the Los Angeles County market shows a degree of specialization, intensity of operation, and large-scale operation found in no other area in the United States. * * * Very little feed is raised on dairy farms in Los Angeles County. Hay and concentrated feeds are purchased by dairy farmers and fed to mature stock which are raised in other counties and States and shipped into Los Angeles after they have reached maturity. * * * Milk Products Industries, Inc., a distributors' organization, has cited census data to indicate that Los Angeles County had the highest volume of milk production of any county in the United States in 1934. * * * Dairy farms in Los Angeles County are larger, in terms of income received, than is the rule in other sections of the country. In 1929, according to the Census, 504 dairy farms, or three-fifths of dairy farms in the county, received incomes of \$10,000 or over. * * * The average size of commercial dairy herds in Los Angeles County is larger than in other milksheds of which I have knowledge, with the exception of San Francisco. In San Francisco, less than 200 farms supply all of the city's fluid-milk requirements. * * * However, Los Angeles displays a considerably higher degree of concentration of cows on large dairies than is the case in San Francisco."

unionization. Also, in contrast to most types of farming for cash produce, employment was relatively stable and nonseasonal.

Extensive organization among dairy farm workers in the two major California milksheds is recent, dating only from early 1934. Labor relations in the industry had become more casual during the period of severe unemployment in the early 1930's. Dairy hands were recruited largely through private employment agencies in the "skid row" sections of Los Angeles. Workers suffered from job insecurity and the employers' power of arbitrary dismissal; they ordinarily worked 11 hours a day, with no days off. Dairy workers organized primarily in order to win holidays, and union hiring halls in place of private fee-charging agencies.³¹

The first dairy workers' local was established in the Los Angeles milkshed area early in 1934 by organizers of the Trade Union Unity League. Several small strikes for union recognition and wage and hour improvements were called by this organization. Dairy-farm proprietors complained about the spread of labor agitation from field crops to dairies. The California Cultivator of January 20, 1934, stated that "investigation has proved that behind the movement, which is supposed to be for recognition of an unknown union not recognized by the A.F. of L., is a group of well-known Communists and red agitators * * * some of whom were said to have been mixed up in the San Joaquin Valley cotton strike last fall." It also stated that many of the larger dairies were reported to be operating with nonunion milkers under armed guard, while smaller ones were compelled to submit to the terms of the strikers.

The center of union activity during the next few years shifted to counties in the San Francisco milkshed where the Brotherhood of Teamsters was most strongly organized. Unionization of dairy workers in this area was more thorough. By the end of 1939 more than four-fifths of the workers in the dairy farms supplying San Francisco were reported to be members of a local of the Brotherhood of Teamsters, which included milk-wagon drivers and milk-plant employees as well as dairy-farm workers in its membership.³²

A series of strikes occurred during 1936 mainly over the issue of union recognition. A 2-month walk-out from April to June won substantial gains for 40 members of the dairy workers' branch of the Brotherhood of Teamsters in Marin County. A comprehensive agreement between the Dairy and Creamery Employees Union and the larger milk companies in June granted a minimum wage of \$65 per month with board and 2 holidays per month. It provided also for an "adjustment board" composed of two union members and two employers' representatives empowered to settle all differences.³³ Later disputes involving some 950 dairy workers in Alameda and 22 in Contra Costa Counties won for the union compromise gains in wage increases and recognition.³⁴

The Marin County milkshed, supplying San Francisco and the East Bay area, by early 1937 had become well organized in the Milkmen Union of the A.F. of L. The union won agreements from dairymen entailing provision for preferential hiring. The Teamsters Union, which included milk-wagon drivers and creamery employees, used the tactic of the secondary boycott and made rapid organization gains among dairy-farm

³¹Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 58 (pp. 21457-21459).

³²Idem (p. 21339).

³³Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 2, July 1936 (p. 4)

³⁴Josiah C. Folsom: Labor Disputes in Agriculture, 1927-38.

hands. In some instances the Teamsters declared milk from certain dairies "hot," in order to force their employees into the union. Injunction proceedings were undertaken by some milk producers; farm employers hoped thus to establish important principles relating to restraint of trade which, if successful, could be applied to other agricultural industries as well.³⁵

The "hot cargo" issue was given considerable publicity in a small strike in Santa Clara County during 1938. By that year some 700 members of the Milkers' Union, affiliated to the A.F. of L. Teamsters, had formulated proposed agreements with employers establishing a wage of \$90 per month plus room and board, 2 days off per month, and a union shop. These agreements were to cover dairies in the counties serving metropolitan San Francisco and Oakland—i.e., Santa Clara, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Marin, Alameda, San Francisco, and Sonoma.³⁶

Three dairy-farm proprietors in Santa Clara County refused to meet the union conditions or even to discuss the matter with union representatives. Eleven union milkers on the three farms were then called out on strike. Milk from the dairies was declared "hot" by the Teamsters and other A.F. of L. affiliates, and San Francisco distributors refused to handle it. In response to this move, the employers diverted the "hot milk" from the fresh-milk market to a cheese factory to sell it at half price.³⁷ The union followed the "hot milk" to the cheese company and threatened a union boycott of that firm and any others that accepted the milk.³⁸

Both disputants enlisted immediate support from their respective organized groups. E. Moorehead, president of the Santa Clara Central Labor Council, endorsed the stand of the union, while the executive committee of the Associated Farmers met in San Francisco and voted resolutions pledging full backing to their Santa Clara dairy-farmer members.³⁹ L. Edwards, president of the Santa Clara County unit of the Associated Farmers, upheld the employers' assertion that the Teamsters Union did not have the right to act as spokesman for the milkers. He expressed particular opposition to a closed shop on dairy farms or other agricultural enterprises. Indeed, he threatened to call the attention of the Humane Society of Santa Clara to the fact that cows were going un milked because of the strike.⁴⁰

The milkers' representatives in the Dairy and Creamery Employees Union, on the other hand, denied that they were seeking a closed shop or union hiring hall. They were requiring merely a provision that any one hired apply to the union for membership within 2 weeks. The union justified its demands on the ground that it was merely asking the struck dairy owners to grant the same wages, hours, and working conditions provided by other dairies in the Bay region, since all were in direct competition for the metropolitan milk markets.⁴⁰

Labor-employer conflict in the dairy industry became more widely publicized and vitriolic when the Teamsters Union extended its organizing campaign to the Los Angeles milkshed. The union had not organized the transportation industry in this area to the same degree as in San Francisco. Throughout its campaign of 1937 and 1938, in Los

³⁵Stockton Record, November 4, 1937.

³⁶San Francisco News, May 28, 1938.

³⁷San Francisco Examiner, March 26, 1938.

³⁸San Jose Mercury Herald, March 26, 1938.

³⁹San Francisco Examiner, March 26, 1938.

⁴⁰San Jose Mercury Herald, March 25, 1938.

Angeles, it faced the organized hostility of the Associated Farmers of California, allied with powerful open-shop associations. A second obstacle was encountered in jurisdictional disputes with a local C.I.O. union of dairy workers.

Left-wing unionists organized an independent Milkers Recreation Club in 1936, after the Trade Union Unity League was dissolved. Later, under the name of the Dairy Workers Union, it won several signed union-shop agreements with dairy farms in Los Angeles County.⁴¹ As a separate farm workers' organization, it faced obvious limitations in collective bargaining, in an industry in which the relationships among producing, processing, and selling were very close and very dependent upon truck transportation. Consequently, the union turned to the C.I.O. early in 1937, before the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was formed, and became affiliated as Local No. 49, having about 1,000 members. The C.I.O. meanwhile had been active in organizing milkers, dairy drivers, and creamery operators.⁴²

Local No. 49, though still in existence by 1940, had lost considerable ground when the A.F. of L. Teamsters Union launched its new organizational campaign. Occasionally minor conflict broke out between the two organizations. Early in November 1937 the regional director of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. (C.I.O.) met with organizers of the dairy workers to plan an increase in the number of union contracts signed with Los Angeles milkshed dairies. He threatened a "milk holiday" in protest against "A.F. of L. goon-squad tactics used against us in the dairy industry."⁴³

The Teamsters Union had an advantage in organizing dairy-farm workers, as it was able to exert pressure through the distributing and processing stages of the industry, in which the truck drivers were highly organized. Through this control it could force contracts upon dairy-farm producers by declaring their milk "hot" and thus cutting off access to urban markets.⁴⁴

The larger producers in the milk industry adopted a protective anti-union position as a result of a vigorous campaign by the open-shop Merchant and Manufacturers Association. Dairy Industries Limited was organized by dairy employers in October 1936, for the purpose of handling labor relations collectively. In its constitution was a clause prohibiting a member from entering into any oral or written agreement with any labor organization without prior notice to the corporation.⁴⁵

Milk producers belonging to Dairy Industries Limited became more conciliatory toward the A.F. of L. Teamsters after the C.I.O. dairy workers' local called a series of strikes in the Hynes area. Contracts were signed in August 1937 with Teamsters Local No. 93 of the Milk

⁴¹Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 58 (p. 21460).

⁴²Idem (p. 21457).

⁴³Los Angeles Examiner, November 2, 1937.

⁴⁴Joe Casey, western representative of the A.F. of L., justified this organizational drive, on the grounds of precedent, as follows:

"There is one particular industry in which we always went inside of the factory, and that was in the dairy industry—the milk industry. When we organized the drivers years ago, the milk driver was everything. He was generally a small farmer who maintained a few cows, milked those cows, and took the milk then and distributed it himself. The whole operation was handled more or less by a handful of people around a small dairy farm. At that time we organized those people and we also had jurisdiction reaching right into the actual milker. Of course the dairy end of it has become highly specialized now, but we have never lost our jurisdiction. We have always maintained and always attempted to organize everything connected with the milk industry inside the plant as far as pasteurization, bottling and cleaning up things—as far as things of that sort are concerned—right down to the milking of the cows." (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 58, p. 21363.)

⁴⁵Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 58 (p. 21342).

Drivers Union. By the end of the year about 45 percent of the milk production and at least 75 percent of the distribution in Los Angeles County were unionized.⁴⁶

Attempts to sign up independent distributors and producers caused some conflict. Milk-wagon drivers went on strike against 14 major dairy employers in Ventura County who refused to deal with "a union and picket line which does not represent our employees." Though many organized milkers failed to participate in sympathy with the drivers, the walk-out spread to Los Angeles and Santa Barbara Counties before it was settled.⁴⁷

The contractual arrangement between dairy union and employers' association was unstable and temporary at best. Dairy Industries Limited was disbanded shortly after the agreements were signed. A new organization, Milk Products Industries Incorporated, was established to cooperate more closely with urban anti-union organizations. A report of the Associated Farmers of Los Angeles County, dated December 1, 1937, summarized the labor situation as follows:

These contracts expire on February 1, 1938, and indications point to serious troubles if closed shop is demanded. This struggle will center in a battle between the C.I.O. and the milkers' division of the Teamsters Union for control of production during 1938, with the dairies of nearly every southern California county involved. Steps are being taken for coordinated action against all unionization of milk production. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 58, p. 21365.)

Branches of the Associated Farmers in the five southern counties in the Los Angeles milkshed—Ventura, Orange, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and San Diego—held a series of meetings, and a "dairy committee" was established for the entire area. Its official position was that the dairy farmer came before the distributing group, and it would not approve any contract which would stop "hot" milk at the distributors' platforms.⁴⁸ The Associated Farmers upheld the opposition of the Milk Products Industries Incorporated to the closed-shop clause proposed by the union in February 1938. A letter from the secretary of the Associated Farmers to the Milk Products Industries Incorporated, on February 22, 1938, expressed these sentiments:

The Associated Farmers of Orange County through their dairy division wish to commend your attitude in taking a definite stand against the closed-shop practice in the milk industry. We are asking you to continue on this basis, and want to assure you that you will have our complete support in your program as long as you insist upon keeping control of your own business. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 58, p. 21395.)

Other open-shop organizations of Los Angeles, such as the Neutral Thousands and the Women of the Pacific, stiffened the dairy employers' opposition to union demands. Mrs. Bessie Ochs of the former organization discussed the issues in a special radio broadcast:

⁴⁶Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 58 (p. 21365).

⁴⁷Los Angeles Examiner, October 19, 1937.

⁴⁸Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 58 (p. 21366). A. E. Clark, field secretary for the Associated Farmers of Los Angeles County, explained the opposition to unions as owing primarily to the current C.I.O.-A.F.L. conflict. In his own words, "there was a serious prospect of jurisdictional dispute between the C.I.O. and the A.F. of L. during the organization of the milk business here, and as soon as the teamsters' organization entered into the contracts with the distributors in town, those distributors who had those contracts were fearful that on their farms, if the C.I.O. should get a foothold, they would be subjected to very serious situations, and rather welcomed the opportunity of having the same union involved in both cases." (Idem, p. 21379.)

Not men seizing an opportunity to rob and kill, but men sitting in comfortable city offices who calmly and deliberately plan to control the roads that are the property of the community. Any rogues who believe the roads are the vital link between dairy farm and home and as such plot to stop all milk trucks unless both producer and consumer pay them tribute are the greatest rogues of all. Several times in the past 6 months these men have seemed ready to carry their plans into effect and then, frightened by the vigilance of organizations such as the Neutral Thousands that are working for industrial peace, have decided to wait a little longer.

But I tell you that, because the milk trucks roll unmolested between the orange groves and the fields of lupin today, it is not because the plot has been abandoned. No, these plotters have only made strategic retreat. The instant they believe we have relaxed our vigilance, they will strike swiftly and suddenly. So we must not relax our watch for a second. For the sake of our babies and children, we must keep eternal sentry duty, so that the milk trucks shall never cease rolling, so that the wild flowers growing along our highways shall not be desecrated by overturned trucks or splashed with spilled milk—or, perhaps, with blood of the drivers. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 58, p. 21393.)

Negotiations ended in a stalemate during 1938 as a result of the organized opposition to union demands. A new contract granting an increase in wages was not reached until October, after the Teamsters Union had threatened the milk industry with a general strike. Milk Drivers Union No. 93, Brotherhood of Teamsters, and the Milk Products Industry Incorporated, finally signed an agreement in November 1939, granting a compromise union shop to 2,000 to 3,500 organized workers.⁴⁹

Minor labor troubles continued as the Teamsters Union extended its organizing efforts to dairy employees in more outlying areas. Twenty organized milkers struck in June 1939 on the 1,000-acre Panorama Ranch dairy farm near Van Nuys (Los Angeles County), to enforce union demands for the standard \$90 per month and board for milkers, as against the prevailing \$75 to \$80. Authorities feared that the Teamsters Union might attempt a road blockade to prevent pick-up of the ranch's milk. However, the strike was quickly settled.⁵⁰

Produce Trucking

The Teamsters' success in unionizing dairy workers aroused a great deal of apprehension among farm employers. They felt that this was the entering wedge for an A.F. of L. campaign to organize agricultural workers in other fields. Joe Casey, western representative of the A.F. of L., denied, however, that the Teamsters intended to go beyond their usual jurisdiction, which he claimed to include by precedent milkers and helpers on dairy farms as well as truck drivers.⁵¹

A unionizing campaign in the produce-trucking business provoked organized opposition from farmers. The Teamsters' representatives denied allegations that they were attempting to force union conditions upon farmers, members of farmers' families, or their farm hands who were hauling their own produce to and from markets. The union was concerned only with farmers who entered the transportation business, hauling other people's produce for a fee, in competition with trucking companies which had contracts with the union.⁵² It came into conflict

⁴⁹Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 58 (p. 21415).

⁵⁰Los Angeles Examiner, June 24, 1939.

In mid-January, 1940, another strike at this ranch, involving the same 20 milkers, was settled in less than a week by the Teamsters' representative, Paul Jones. (Los Angeles Evening News, Jan. 20, 1940.)

⁵¹Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 58 (p. 21362).

⁵²Idem (p. 21362).

with the Associated Farmers despite the latter's preference for the A.F. of L. Teamsters rather than the C.I.O. Longshoremen. In a press release dated October 19, 1937, the Associated Farmers explained its position to the Teamsters' representatives:

We are informed of the record of the Teamsters Union and have knowledge of the fact that for more than 37 years you have endeavored to follow a conservative and constructive policy. We are fully aware of the magnitude of your present fight against the C.I.O. and the notorious alien, Harry Bridges, and in that fight we are with you.

However, we cannot admit that the Teamsters Union, or any other organization or individual, has a legal right to prevent the free movement of transportation along our public highways or the delivery of our goods to market. You may enter into a contractual arrangement governing or controlling such transportation and delivery and the contract should be adhered to, but it must always be considered as an extra-legal contract.

* * * It would be economically impossible for the farmer in question to employ a union teamster all the year round and pay him union wages to operate a truck perhaps once a week on a casual trip to town for supplies. It would likewise be impractical to hire union teamsters to operate the other farmer-owned trucks during the brief season when the harvest is being reaped, and where the hauling would take only 2 or 3 hours during the day.

In neither instance is the farmer interfering with the contractual arrangements that teamsters have been striving for years to complete with the ordinary industrial concerns. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 58, p. 21360.)

As opposition to the Teamsters' drive strengthened, the Associated Farmers began to support nonfarm business firms which were willing to fight the union. This was disclosed in the course of a small but highly publicized strike against an independent firm, the Knudsen Truck & Warehouse Co.

The Knudsen Co., as a member of the Orange Belt Draymen's Association, had had contractual relations with the Teamsters for several years. The union drew up a new contract in 1938, calling for a wage increase from the prevailing 75 cents per hour to 87½ cents. Upon the company's refusal to sign, it was suspended from the Draymen's Association and its union drivers were called out on strike.⁵³

Knudsen, whose company hauled farm produce chiefly, was a member of the Associated Farmers of San Bernardino County. This group came to his aid, obtaining business for his lines and giving him protection where he felt it was needed. Hugh Osborne, secretary-manager of the Associated Farmers of Imperial Valley, announced that his organization intended to make an issue of Knudsen's case, and that ranchers in five southern counties had formed a committee to prevent a "union-harassed farm-commodities truck operator" from being put out of business. In Osborne's words, "Knudsen now is a symbol with us. We find we have a government within our government. There is a great American principle at stake. We are going to help him stay in business."⁵⁴

Knudsen continued to operate with nonunion drivers. According to his own testimony, he was subjected to intimidation from the union and faced considerable losses. In one instance 30 growers accompanied a truckload of oranges, driven by nonunion men, to San Pedro; the convoy encountered difficulty when longshoremen of the I.L.W.U. (C.I.O.) refused to handle cargo brought onto the docks by strikebreakers.⁵⁵

⁵³Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 58 (p. 21478).

⁵⁴Idem (p. 21484).

⁵⁵Idem (pp. 21481-21483, 21490).

Teamsters Local No. 898 was balked in its efforts to organize hay loaders, grocery drivers, and warehousemen in the Imperial Valley during 1938 and 1939. In these attempts also the union faced organized opposition from the Associated Farmers, explained by Hugh Osborne thus:

We know this to be a fact, that the first move on the part of the union is to unionize the wholesale groceries. Then they can say to the retail groceries, "Come in line," because they get their supplies from the wholesale grocers.

* * * We don't propose to allow the closed shop to get in here, and increase the cost of living in our community 10, 15, or 20 percent, and stand idly by to see that done.⁵⁶

Miscellaneous Processing Industries

The A.F. of L. made substantial gains in 1937 and the following years in many small processing industries related more or less distantly to agriculture. Federal labor union affiliates conducted a few small strikes in nurseries and greenhouses. Twenty-two members of an A.F. of L. local in Alameda County participated in an unsuccessful 10-day strike late in January 1937, over the issue of discriminatory discharge. One hundred union members in June carried out a 1-day strike that won partial union recognition and wage increases.⁵⁷ Seventy-five members of Federal Labor Union No. 20218 of Niles (Alameda County) struck in March 1937 against the California Flower Nurseries. Violence flared on March 12, 1937, when 75 pickets were reported to have been surrounded by deputies and highway patrol officers, attacked with clubs, and chased 2 miles.⁵⁸ The most substantial union gains in this field were won in San Francisco. An industry-wide collective-bargaining agreement was negotiated and signed in June 1938 between six major wholesale flower-growing companies, represented by the Industrial Association of San Francisco, and the Gardeners and Nursery Workers Union of the A.F. of L. The contract, renewable in a year, provided for preferential hiring of union members, minimum wages ranging from 47 cents per hour for general laborers to 72 cents per hour for foremen, \$25.50 to \$39 by the week or \$110.50 to \$169.50 by the month, a 9-hour day, and 6-day week.⁵⁹

Union jurisdiction over the wine industry of California was divided between affiliates of the A.F. of L. and C.I.O. The workers in almost all wineries in the San Francisco Bay region and two in the San Joaquin Valley, according to a survey by the California State Chamber of Commerce, were organized by the C.I.O. International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union. Most of those at Fresno and several in the Lodi district were organized by the newly established Winery Workers Union of the A.F. of L.⁶⁰ These unions were loosely organized and provided little security for their members in collective bargaining. Federal Labor Union No. 20574 of Lodi, for instance, in a verbal agreement with the companies, conceded that in event of rush work the winery could employ nonunion men freely. The growers were also protected against sympathetic action in event of strikes of field workers during

⁵⁶Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 58 (pp. 21497-21509).

⁵⁷Josiah C. Folsom: *Labor Disputes in Agriculture, 1927-38.*

⁵⁸Los Angeles Evening News, March 13, 1937.

⁵⁹San Francisco News, June 3, 1938.

⁶⁰Stockton Record, November 4, 1937.

the harvest season; winery workers could walk out only if a general strike were called from the Washington headquarters of the A.F. of L.⁶¹

Minor conflict between the A.F. of L. and the C.I.O. unions occurred in other processing industries. Rival unions attempting to organize labor in almond-shelling plants were unable for some time to agree upon demands. In the poultry industry, the unions made little or no progress among farms; but substantial organization gains, about equally divided between A.F. of L. and C.I.O., were achieved in northern California among feed handlers, chicken and turkey pickers, candlers, warehousemen, and teamsters. The only strikes reported in this industry were small, though long in duration. During November a strike of 50 turkey pickers in Stanislaus County resulted, after a month, in compromise wage increases. In Sacramento County during the same period, a strike by 80 members of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. for jurisdictional control and recognition was won after almost a month.⁶² The greatest single victory in this industry came late in the year when Local No. 17 of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. won a contract with the Runnymede enterprise in the vicinity of Resida (Los Angeles County), reported to be the world's largest poultry farm. The terms included recognition of the union as sole bargaining agent; wage increases of \$1 per day for all employees; seniority rights; a week of 40 hours for women and 48 hours for men; time and a half for overtime; and 1 week's vacation with pay.⁶³

The most confusing jurisdictional overlapping and interunion conflict between A.F. of L. and C.I.O. developed during 1937 in the lettuce-packing industry of Salinas, which at that time was under investigation by the National Labor Relations Board for anti-union activities. Local No. 18211 of the A.F. of L. had lost heavily in membership because of its defeat in 1936 and, following this, an effective blacklist imposed by the employers.⁶⁴

A new independent and unaffiliated Fruit and Vegetable Workers Association was organized during the spring of 1937 to supplant Local No. 18211. Its spokesmen claimed that it represented "1,300 of the more conservative lettuce workers." A. J. Doss, president of Local No. 18211, was critical of the new organization: "They say they are just the conservative workers, but it's a company union. We've had reports that Imperial Valley strikebreakers are helping to organize the new bunch."⁶⁵

A union contract was drawn up in June, after more than a month's negotiations, between the new independent union and representatives of the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association. Included in the terms were wage scales of 65 cents per hour, time and a half for Sundays and holidays for truck drivers, a wage increase of 5 cents per hour for carrot packers, washers, and crate dumpers, and overtime pay after 8 p.m. and/or 10 hours per day. The Berkeley Gazette in its issue of June 18, 1937, observed optimistically that "the agreement ends a controversy which reached its height in the strike last year."

The issues were far from settled, however. By November 1937, a survey by the agricultural committee of the State Chamber of Commerce reported four factions working at cross purposes: The new union, which

⁶¹Sacramento Bee, May 7, 1937.

⁶²Josiah C. Folsom: *Labor Disputes in Agriculture, 1927-38.*

⁶³Commonwealth Times (Santa Maria), Vol. II, No. 23, November 22, 1937; Stockton Record, November 4, 1937.

⁶⁴Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 1, January 1937 (p. 5); NLRB Report of Cases 178 to 178ee.

⁶⁵San Jose Mercury-Herald, May 17, 1937; San Francisco Chronicle, May 11, 1937.

had an agreement with the industry; a newly organized local of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. (C.I.O.); a small group which wished to revive the old A.F. of L. Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union No. 18211; and a large number of workers who wanted no affiliation with any union.⁶⁶ Subsequently, the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. obtained local jurisdiction by winning an election supervised by the National Labor Relations Board.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Drive During 1937-38

Processing Industries

The newly organized C.I.O. international, the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America, or U.C.A.P.A.W.A., won few major organizing gains in the processing industries of California. Its efforts were frustrated by the A.F. of L.'s control over truck transportation and particularly by its closed-shop contract covering the important fruit and vegetable canning industry of northern California. The C.I.O. organization's main victories were won in fish canning, where it had the strategic support of the allied International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union. Early in November, despite alleged company support for the A.F. of L., the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. won jurisdiction over 600 fish-cannery workers in San Diego in a NLRB-supervised election.⁶⁷ There were more important achievements in the Alaska salmon-canning industry; a union contract was signed with the employers, granting wage increases, union recognition, and other concessions for workers hired from San Francisco and Seattle. U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Locals Nos. 5 and 7 in these two cities became the "anchors" for the international union on the Pacific Coast. Later other locals were organized in cotton compresses and gins in Bakersfield, Madera, and other San Joaquin Valley towns.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. met reverses in other minor processing industries. Mushroom workers in one of its locals struck unsuccessfully against the Golden State Mushroom Co., in Redwood City, during December 1937. The strike was lost because of inadequate organization and internal discipline, which led to disorder and costly court action. Three strikers were arrested and subsequently convicted by the San Mateo Superior Court on charges of rioting; they had boarded a truck loaded with "hot" mushrooms and dumped them over the side.⁶⁸

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s efforts to unionize the walnut industry of southern California led to one of the numerous test cases before the National Labor Relations Board. Six workers at the plant of the California Walnut Growers Association in the fall of 1937 lodged a complaint with the NLRB that they had been locked out for refusing to join a company-sponsored union. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. previously had filed a charge with the Board to the effect that the Walnut Growers' Employees Association was a company union in violation of the Wagner Act.⁶⁹ The Walnut Growers Association, claiming to be an "agricultural" enterprise, unsuccessfully challenged the NLRB's jurisdiction over its employees.⁷⁰

⁶⁶Stockton Record, November 4, 1937.

⁶⁷CIO News, Vol. I, No. 48, November 5, 1938.

⁶⁸San Francisco Examiner, April 21, 1938.

⁶⁹Los Angeles Illustrated News, October 14, 1937.

⁷⁰Los Angeles Examiner, November 25, 1937.

Unionization of Field Workers

The A.F. of L.'s organization achievements and jurisdictional disputes with the C.I.O. in the processing industries during 1937 and early 1938 overshadowed the union campaign among field workers. Unionizing field workers by themselves had long been considered a losing proposition. A self-sustaining union of agricultural laborers required in advance a strong base membership of more-skilled and better-paid workers in allied processing industries, whose dues could subsidize a long organizing campaign in rural areas.

The C.I.O. program for agricultural labor was checked when it lost control of the more important processing industries, particularly fruit and vegetable canning, to the A.F. of L. Financed by substantial advances of money from the central executive of the C.I.O., as well as by donations from various sympathizers, the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in California and other States was able for a time to organize unskilled field laborers hitherto neglected by the more conservative A.F. of L. It maintained a skeleton staff of organizers in rural areas to direct strikes and enroll the workers in local unions.

Particularly costly were the numerous unorganized spontaneous strikes which periodically broke out, and which the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. felt morally obligated to direct when appealed to for aid. An adequate financial and membership base to support this program was lacking, and ultimately the union had to abandon its organization of field workers. In California it turned over its locals to the A.F. of L., whose National Council of Agricultural and Cannery Workers supported by the Teamsters Union, was better able to carry on.

California's farm laborers were relatively quiescent during 1937 and 1938, as measured by the number, size, and violence of the strikes in which they participated. As compared to the 24 strikes involving more than 13,600 workers during 1936, only 15 small strikes totaling less than 4,000 workers in 1937, and 13 strikes of less than 5,500 workers in 1938 occurred. The decline in the militancy of farm labor was explained in part by the preoccupation of both A.F. of L. and C.I.O. with organizing allied processing industries. A more important reason was the chronic surplus of farm laborers and consequent weakening of their bargaining power. Influx of "drought refugees" from the Middle West and Southwest was reaching a peak in numbers during 1937 and 1938. These newcomers, individualistic small-farm operators for the most part, had had little experience with labor unions. In the dependent and poverty-stricken condition in which many of them arrived in California, they were little inclined to jeopardize by strike action what brief jobs they could get.

Minor jurisdictional disputes between the A.F. of L. and C.I.O., nevertheless, did extend into agriculture. Most field workers' organizations of California by early 1937 had become affiliated to the A.F. of L. as federal labor unions. These, together with several cannery workers' unions and independent Filipino and Mexican organizations, sent official delegations to the first convention of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. at Denver in July. Subsequently, they became part of the new organiza-

tion.⁷¹ Jurisdictional problems arose when the A.F. of L. attempted to maintain its local union charters and refused to recognize new U.C.A.P.A.W.A. locals. In some localities it chartered new federal labor unions to parallel and compete with established C.I.O. organizations. The problem became even more confused in areas where independent Filipino or Mexican unions remained more or less apart from both C.I.O. and A.F. of L.⁷²

APRICOT STRIKE IN YOLO COUNTY⁷³

Conflict between the A.F. of L. and C.I.O. in agriculture first appeared in one of the only two general or crop-wide strikes in California during 1937; this was a walk-out involving some 500 apricot workers in Yolo and Solano Counties during June. This incident was of special interest in illustrating the reactions and conflicts of various interest groups in a rural community.

Early in May 1937, the "intelligence service" of the Associated Farmers of California had reported that "the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen have now organized a Union of Farm and Field Workers at Knights Landing, Yolo County, close to the city of Woodland, and have now applied to the national for a charter."

The union, chartered as Agricultural Workers Union Local No. 20241 of Sacramento, took in members throughout the Sacramento Valley and established branches in Winters, Marysville, Knights Landing, Walnut Grove, Isleton, and Woodland. Organizers were active in Yolo, Solano, Yuba, and Sacramento Counties, creating local "workers' committees" in various communities.⁷⁴ The union was estimated to have about 500 paid-up members in good standing by June 1937, and an additional 1,000 workers had paid admission fees and applied for membership.

A strike of apricot workers began in the vicinity of Winters (Solano County) in the middle of June, after organized growers had refused union demands for 40 cents per hour and union recognition and had agreed upon a flat wage of 35 cents per hour. The labor surplus rendered the strike ineffective. The Winters Express in its June 25, 1937, issue claimed that "it was not a workers' strike—it was an attempt of the unemployed to stop the work of the employed."

The first step was a series of open meetings addressed by union organizers, who planned to call a strike after the growers had refused

⁷¹Official Proceedings of First National Convention of U.C.A.P.A.W.A., Denver, Colo., July 9-12, 1937. The official list of delegates included representatives from the following unions in California: Agricultural Workers Union—No. 20221 of Stockton, No. 20241 of Sacramento, No. 20539 of Marysville, and No. 20289 of Bakersfield; Fruit Workers Union No. 18211 of Watsonville; Field Workers Union No. 20326 of Guadalupe; Citrus Workers Union No. 20539 of Santa Ana; Cannery Workers Union No. 20325 of San Jose and No. 20099 of Oakland and Richmond; Cannery and Preserve Workers No. 20686 of Santa Clara; Dairy Workers Union (C.I.O.) of Los Angeles; Filipino Labor Union of Los Angeles; Confederacion do Campesinos y Obreras Mexicanos (C.U.C.O.M.), Los Angeles; Union de Obreras y Campesinos, San Diego; and Japanese Farm Workers Union of California, Los Angeles.

Some of these organizations, such as Agricultural Workers Union No. 20211 of Stockton, Cannery Workers Unions No. 20325 of San Jose, No. 20099 of Oakland, and No. 20686 of Santa Clara, were "paper organizations," since their leadership previously had been ousted and new unions chartered in their place by the State federation.

⁷²Some of these formerly independent unions, working in collaboration with or directly affiliated to the U.C.A.P.A.W.A., charged the A.F. of L. with creating "dummy unions" in the form of competing "paper" organizations sanctioned by federal labor union charters. (See Rural Worker, July 1937, p. 1; Commonwealth Times, December 24, 1937.)

⁷³Except as otherwise noted, data in this section are from Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 49 (pp. 17949-17955, 17965-17987, 18124, 18213).

⁷⁴Sacramento Union, June 2, 1937.

the union demands. Complications arose when the organizers suddenly announced a change of affiliation from the A.F. of L. to the C.I.O. They explained to the rank and file that the A.F. of L. had "sold out" the workers, and that the International Longshoremen's Association was soon to change to the C.I.O. (apparently on the widely held rumor that John L. Lewis had appropriated \$50,000 to organize agricultural laborers on the Pacific Coast, and that Harry Bridges was to direct the campaign).

This sudden change stiffened the opposition of growers and brought jurisdictional conflict with representatives of the A.F. of L. A group from the Teamsters Union addressed meetings of strikers, cautioning them against joining the C.I.O., "an organization of Communists," and warning them that a strike would have no official standing with the A.F. of L.

Growers faced the prospect of crop losses if the Teamsters Union declared the apricots picked by the C.I.O. to be "hot," and refused to transport them. The local Associated Farmers organized the grower-employers and their supporters to cooperate with local law-enforcement authorities in combating the strike. At an annual meeting of the Associated Farmers in December 1936, B. A. Schwartz, president of the Yolo County unit, described his organization in the following words:

I have found that the Associated Farmers is an organization carrying the fight for the industrialists. We must work together and realize that there is an inter-dependence. The sheriff, the district attorney and supervisor practically form the Associated Farmers in Yolo County. (Hearings, p. 17952.)

The pickers organized a system of "flying squads" to make contact with nonstriking farm workers. When they attempted to stop cannery trucks from gathering up fruit, county ordinances were passed prohibiting picketing and camping on highways. The strike was in effect broken through the arrest of almost two dozen pickets. Workers willing to take jobs were placed on ranches, while those not willing were given "floating orders" out of the community.

The Winters Express, in its June 25, 1937, issue, summarized the strike situation dramatically:

The week of June 21 will go down in the history of Winters as one of the most eventful periods in the life of this unusually peaceful and quiet community. With the sheriffs of both Yolo and Solano Counties, and squads from the State highway patrol, plus specially appointed deputies, the citizens of the district succeeded in breaking up a labor disturbance which has been brewing for the past 3 weeks, and reached its climax Tuesday.

VEGETABLE WORKERS' STRIKE IN SANTA MARIA VALLEY

Mexicans and Filipinos, organized in their own independent unions in the Santa Maria Valley, participated in the only other field workers' strike of importance in 1937. This area had been free of strikes for several years, as local Mexican, Filipino, and white workers' unions had carried on peaceful bargaining relations with the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association. All disputes and controversial issues between organized labor and employers had been submitted for settlement to an arbitration board under the chairmanship of Prof. R. L. Adams of the University of California. The board was finally dissolved in January 1937, when it was felt that labor relations had become so stabilized that arbitration was no longer necessary.

The contract between the union and the association expired in December 1937. The field workers demanded wage increases in a new agreement for the coming year, and when these were refused by the organized growers, the Filipino and Mexican unions called a strike. Approximately 3,000 workers were involved directly and an additional 1,000 indirectly. The walk-out ended within 5 days, when the unions withdrew their demands. Union spokesmen explained that adverse economic conditions and low market quotations for vegetables, in a period of general economic recession, did not warrant the wage increases demanded. The 1937 contract was renewed.⁷⁶

Spokesmen for Filipinos organized in U.C.A.P.A.W.A. locals No. 69 of Guadalupe, No. 71 of Lompoc, and No. 72 of Pismo Beach claimed that the settlement was a defeat for the independent Philippine Islands Labor Union Incorporated. They blamed the defeat on that union's refusal to cooperate with the C.I.O. Prior to the strike, Filipino field workers in the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. (C.I.O.) had formulated a schedule of demands to be submitted to the growers and had invited the president of the Philippine Islands Labor Union Incorporated to cooperate in enforcing them.⁷⁶ That organization had opposed the U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s efforts, and on one occasion had ejected C.I.O. members from its meeting.⁷⁷

CITRUS WORKERS

The C.I.O. and A.F. of L. both made progress in unionizing field and packing-shed workers in the citrus industry during 1937 and 1938. Organizational advances for several years were somewhat nullified by interunion rivalries. However, the unions did win one notable legal victory; citrus exchanges and employers' associations, ordinarily considered to be "agricultural," were brought under the jurisdiction of the National Labor Relations Board.

Local unions among Mexican citrus workers of Orange, Los Angeles, and Ventura Counties had had a relatively long and involved history of internecine strife, and the A.F. of L.-C.I.O. split in agriculture and allied industries led to further confusion. In Orange County, for instance, a local Mexican union had been in existence since 1933, and had taken part in several strikes. Early in 1937 many of its members withdrew to join the newly chartered A.F. of L. Farm Laborers Union Local No. 20699, though enough remained to maintain the original organization. A few months later most of the members of Local No. 20699 left it, in turn, to join a local of the new C.I.O. international, the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Twenty members remained with the A.F. of L. organization, which was rechartered as Citrus Workers Union Local No. 20688. Thus, three distinct unions were claiming jurisdiction simultaneously. This situation seriously impeded the settlement of strikes in the area.⁷⁸

The A.F. of L. renewed its organizing drive in July 1937, shortly after the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was formed. It immediately faced strong opposition from employers, who made anti-union threats, circulated notices vilifying "outside agitators," and discharged union members. The union lodged complaints with the NLRB,⁷⁹ which in January 1939

⁷⁶Philippines Mail (Salinas), Vol. 7, No. 26, November 28, 1937, and Vol. 8, No. 3, December 20, 1937.

⁷⁶Western Worker, November 25, 1937.

⁷⁷Commonwealth Times, Vol. II, No. 24, December 21, 1937.

⁷⁸Field notes.

⁷⁹Hollywood Citizen News, August 21, 1937.

finally issued "cease and desist" orders against the North Whittier Heights Citrus Association of Puente, a cooperative packing plant owned by 200 citrus growers. It was ordered to reinstate with back pay 27 packing-house workers, to end "interference with their self-organization" as members of an A.F. of L. local, and to refrain from spying on union meetings.⁸⁰

The A.F. of L. by the fall of 1938 claimed to have organized and chartered six local unions of citrus-fruit packing and byproducts workers in Corona, Ontario, Pasadena, Puente, and Upland.⁸¹ The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. during 1939, however, superseded it in this field, and it did not regain its dominant position until early in 1941.

When it was ruled that citrus associations were nonagricultural, this A.F. of L. victory brought to a head the opposition of the organized employers to Federal legislation. The National Labor Relations Board had rendered several decisions that were unfavorable to employers in processing industries allied to agriculture, including citrus fruits, walnut packing, and lettuce packing and shipping. California farm interests, acting through the Agricultural Producers Labor Committee, launched a drive to persuade Congress to curb the extension of Federal legislation over agriculture. They wished particularly to check the National Labor Relations Board's decisions, to limit what they regarded as encroachment of the new Wage and Hour Administration onto the farm, and to procure exemptions for agricultural and allied workers from the jurisdiction of the Social Security Board. A committee of three, including C. B. Moore of the Western Growers Protective Association, went to Washington to formulate and direct the program.⁸²

Farm-Labor Unionism in 1938

The agricultural labor front in California was even quieter during 1938 than it had been in 1937. The farm-labor surplus had become chronic and was continuously fed by an influx of southwestern refugees. The labor movement in general, and particularly the C.I.O., had suffered a temporary decline in membership and financial strength because of the serious recession of late 1937 and 1938. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. organizing drive in rural areas consequently lost a good deal of momentum.

Twelve strikes, the same number as in 1937, were reported among field laborers during 1938, and the total number of workers involved also remained roughly the same as the year before. Most of the walk-outs were small, localized, and spontaneous. Three large crop-wide or general strikes temporarily captured public attention. These included approximately 650 sheep shearers in Kern County and surrounding areas during April, 2,000 pea pickers in Sacramento County during May, and 5,000 cotton pickers in Kern County during August and September. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was more active than the A.F. of L. among field workers; the only affiliate of the latter to lead an agricultural strike was the Sheep Shearers Union of North America. This incident, the longest and most bitterly fought labor conflict in farming during 1938, is described

⁸⁰New York Times, January 21, 1939.

⁸¹Proceedings, 1938, of California State Federation of Labor (San Francisco), (pp. 41-45).

⁸²Los Angeles Times, January 4, 1939.

in more detail in Chapter XIV (pages 229-230). It constituted a serious defeat for rural unionism.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. restricted its activities considerably because of financial stringency. Its activities in strikes were confined almost entirely to assuming leadership and control of movements which had developed spontaneously. The District No. 2 office reported that in a dozen instances workers in unorganized spontaneous strikes came to the union for aid.⁸³

Pea Pickers' Strike

The first union-supported strike in 1938 occurred among some 2,000 pea pickers in Sacramento County during May. It began with a spontaneous walk-out of a few hundred pickers, demanding restoration of a previously announced rate of 25 cents per hamper, as against the prevailing 21-cent rate being paid by labor contractors.

The strikers enlisted the aid of organizers from the local U.C.A.P.-A.W.A. headquarters in Sacramento. Wage demands were raised to a rate of 1 cent per pound or 30 cents per hamper, and pickets were sent to other centers, such as Valdez, Central Souza, and Willow Point, to extend the strike throughout the pea-growing area.⁸⁴ Within a few days approximately 2,000 pickers were reported to be taking part.⁸⁵

The strike was remarkably peaceful, considering the numbers involved, and no arrests were made. After a few days the strikers won their wage demand of 30 cents per hamper; this rate benefited some 5,000 pickers employed throughout the crop area.⁸⁵

This easy victory was explained in part by the sympathetic attitude of employer groups themselves. The Sacramento Valley Council of the State Chamber of Commerce, representing 10 northern California counties, flatly charged "chiselling" labor contractors with responsibility for the outbreak. It exonerated the pea growers and laid the trouble to the 21-cent rate paid by contractors who previously had promised the pickers 25 cents. The council further advised laborers to "locate the source of false representation of farm labor needs" and to demand prosecution as a means for averting such disturbances later in the season.⁸⁶ According to U.C.A.P.A.W.A. spokesmen, "so hard boiled were shippers and labor contractors in their wage slashes that even the Clarksburg branch of the Associated Farmers refused to support them."⁸⁷

Further labor trouble was not averted in this area, however. A few days after this strike, the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. placed pickets in front of the State Employment Service office to protest the hiring of beet-field workers at 35 cents per hour. The union asserted that the minimum Government rate was 40 cents per hour for labor employed by growers receiving AAA benefits.⁸⁸

Another strike of several hundred pea pickers occurred in San Benito County during September 1938. These workers, who according to some reports had been averaging 10 to 15 cents per hour at a rate of 21

⁸³Official Report (mimeographed) U.C.A.P.A.W.A. District No. 2, San Francisco. December 1938 (pp. 1, 2).

⁸⁴Sacramento Bee, May 12, 1938.

⁸⁵Labor Herald (Sacramento), May 19, 1938.

⁸⁶San Francisco Examiner, May 14, 1938.

⁸⁷Labor Herald, Sacramento, May 19, 1938.

⁸⁸Sacramento Union, May 19, 1938.

cents per hamper, struck spontaneously for a 30-cent rate. Again the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was appealed to for aid. In this instance, according to union spokesmen, some 200 members of the Associated Farmers cooperated with the State highway patrol to drive labor organizers out of the county and to carry on a policy of "forceful eviction" against the strikers.⁸⁹

Cotton Pickers' Strike in Kern County

The most serious labor troubles during 1938 were centered in Kern County. A small strike of some 68 grape pickers broke out spontaneously during January, in protest against wage decreases. A restoration of previous wage rates was won with the help of C.I.O. organizers. Again in August the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. helped 150 peach pickers win a spontaneous strike for wage increases.⁹⁰

These minor outbreaks culminated in a spontaneous walk-out of approximately 3,000 cotton pickers in the Shafter area of Kern County during September. The strike was in protest against the organized growers' offer of 75 cents per hundredweight instead of the 90-cent scale of the previous year. Strikers demanded an increase in rates to \$1 per hundredweight.⁹¹ The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. declared itself taken completely by surprise. An organizer who was rushed from its San Francisco headquarters found the strikers without leadership and uncertain of their course of action.⁹² New demands were formulated, under union direction, calling for the testing of weighing machines, job stewards for each field, payment of wages in full each Saturday, drinking water near the cotton wagon, and rehiring of strikers without discrimination.⁹³

Both strike and strikebreaking tactics reminiscent of 1933 were revived. Caravans of strikers and organizers drove from field to field endeavoring to extend the walk-out in scope and effectiveness. The Associated Farmers of Kern County sought to prevent this by tabulating the strikers' auto licenses as a means for applying a blacklist.⁹⁴ The union claimed that many independent growers who were willing to agree to the strikers' terms were prevented by the Associated Farmers from doing so, by the threat that money to finance the next year's crop would not be forthcoming from banks and cotton-ginning companies.⁹⁵ The San Francisco Chronicle of October 28, 1938, reported that several growers who raised picking rates to 85 or 90 cents per hundredweight under the threat of the strike, were "urged" by other growers to return to the prevailing 75-cent scale and did so. The Associated Farmers refused to negotiate with strike representatives and ignored mediation offers from a Conciliator of the U.S. Department of Labor. Grower-employers maintained that no strike existed, since full picking crews were available.⁹⁶

The strike collapsed before strong and unified opposition from grower-employers and local government officials. Roger Welch, district attorney, announced that he would enforce Kern County's antipicketing ordinance and that officers would be instructed to "stop strikes before they got

⁸⁹CIO News, Vol. 1, No. 43, October 1, 1938.

⁹⁰Josiah C. Folsom: Labor Disputes in Agriculture, 1927-38.

⁹¹San Francisco Chronicle, October 26, 1938.

⁹²CIO News, Vol. 1, No. 47, October 29, 1938 (p. 8).

⁹³Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 51 (p. 18623).

⁹⁴CIO News, Vol. 1, No. 47, October 29, 1938 (p. 1).

⁹⁵Field notes.

started."⁹⁶ Numerous arrests subsequently were made. On one occasion more than 100 pickets in a caravan of 30 automobiles were arrested near Arvin on a charge of "conspiracy to break and enter with intent to incite a riot." The sheriff charged that the strikers assaulted pickers on one ranch with stones and clubs.⁹⁷ H. Pomeroy, director of the State Relief Administration, was also reported to have used his office to help break the strike, by refusing relief to those able to work as strikebreakers in the fields at the rate set by growers.⁹⁸ Protests were expressed by the Workers Alliance and several C.I.O. affiliates, including Dairy Workers Local No. 49 of Los Angeles, the United Fishermen, and the State, County and Municipal Workers of America.⁹⁹ The strike ended after several weeks.

Vegetable Workers' Strike in Orange County

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was more successful in a strike involving some 750 vegetable workers in the vicinity of Santa Ana (Orange County). This dispute, also, began as a spontaneous protest against wage cuts. Its settlement was delayed for several weeks by jurisdictional disputes among three unions: A local of the Mexican C.U.C.O.M., which had been in the county for almost 6 years, the A.F. of L. Citrus Workers Union Local No. 20688, and a local of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A.

Grower-employers, represented jointly by the Orange County Farm Federation, the Japanese Vegetable Growers Association, and the Associated Farmers of Orange County, refused to recognize the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. or to accede to strike demands for wage increases.¹

Pat Callahan, district U.C.A.P.A.W.A. organizer, charged that the Associated Farmers was exerting pressure on Japanese growers to refuse agreements with the union, promising them full compensation for any losses incurred in holding out. The strikebreaking campaign was being financed, he asserted, through levies imposed upon citrus growers in the county. The State Relief Administration again was charged with sending relief clients from Santa Ana to take the places of strikers in the fields.²

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A., nevertheless, claimed to have cleared the fields of strikebreakers within a month and to have defeated an "underhanded campaign" seeking to prevent the C.U.C.O.M. and A.F. of L. locals from affiliating with the C.I.O.³ With the aid of the U.S. Conciliation Service the union was successful in winning one closed-shop contract covering 50 workers and three working agreements covering another 150 workers.⁴

Miscellaneous Strikes

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. took part in other field workers' strikes of smaller size. A short spontaneous walk-out of 25 lettuce workers, opposing a wage decrease, ended with no gain to the workers. Strikes of a

⁹⁶San Francisco Chronicle, October 20, 1938.

⁹⁷Idem, October 26, 1938.

⁹⁸Idem, October 12, 1938.

⁹⁹San Francisco News, October 25, 1938.

Two months previously the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. had passed resolutions praising the WPA for requiring that current relief subsistence wages be paid to agricultural workers before it released them from work relief. At the same time it condemned the State Relief Administration for "separating from its rolls workers for agriculture on a wage offer as low as 20 cents an hour." (San Francisco News, June 3, 1938.)

¹Field notes.

²CIO News, Vol. 1, No. 38, August 27, 1938 (p. 2).

³Official Report (mimeographed), U.C.A.P.A.W.A. District No. 2, San Francisco, December 1938.

dozen apricot workers in San Benito County and 150 pear pickers in Yolo County during July were similarly unsuccessful.⁴ Slight wage increases were won during November in a walk-out of 200 brussels-sprout workers in the vicinity of San Mateo (Santa Cruz County).

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. won compromise wage gains in the citrus industry of Los Angeles County. Its Citrus Workers Union had begun a strike against the San Fernando Heights Lemon Association, which countered by closing down its packing houses and locking out 150 employees, justifying this action as a move for "quieting of an agitated situation" among Mexican citrus-fruit pickers and packers in the valley. The National Labor Relations Board was called in to investigate and arrange a settlement.⁵

General Results of Organization Activity in 1938

The activities of U.C.A.P.A.W.A. (C.I.O.) in rural California during 1938 apparently resulted in a net loss, despite numerous partial victories. The various strikes it led probably prevented wage cutting and temporarily increased its membership in many crop areas. According to its district representative, however, these strikes did not bring organization gains proportional to the effort and cost expended. The district executive board consequently ruled at a meeting in November 1938 that thereafter no spontaneous strike would be supported until it had been thoroughly investigated by a district representative.⁶

Impressive achievements throughout the United States were recorded by the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. at its second annual national convention held in San Francisco during December 1938. It claimed to have grown from a nucleus of scattered A.F. of L. federal labor unions to 408 locals with some 125,000 members throughout the Nation, and to have won over 200 contracts covering 40,000 members.⁷

The organization had little to show for its efforts in California, however. By December 1938 it could claim only 15 local unions in the State, and some of these were hardly more than paper organizations. Cannery Workers Unions No. 11 of San Jose, No. 14 of San Francisco, and No. 15 of Oakland were chartered from the former Federal Labor Unions Nos. 20325, 20989, and 20099, respectively, and had little importance, in view of the fact that the A.F. of L. had already won exclusive recognition from the major canneries in these communities. U.C.A.P.A.W.A. locals No. 12 of Marysville, No. 20 of Stockton, and No. 33 of Sacramento, which had been chartered from the former Agricultural Workers Federal Labor Unions Nos. 20539, 20221, and 20241, respectively, were temporarily inactive. They were revived later, in strikes during the summer and fall of 1939. Agricultural Workers Federal Labor Unions No. 20284 of Bakersfield, No. 10912 of Watsonville, No. 20886 of Santa Clara, and No. 20326 of Guadalupe, all of which had been represented at the first national convention in Denver during July 1937, were no longer in existence. U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Locals No. 69 of Santa Maria, No. 71 of Lompoc, and No. 72 of Pismo Beach, chartered from branches of the Filipino Labor Union, likewise had disappeared or become inactive.

⁴Josiah C. Folsom: *Labor Disputes in Agriculture, 1927-38.*

⁵*Los Angeles Times, August 27, 1938.*

⁶Official Report (mimeographed), U.C.A.P.A.W.A. District No. 2, San Francisco, December 1938 (p. 46).

⁷CIO News, Vol. 1, No. 53, December 12, 1938 (p. 3).

Of the older established locals, only No. 3 of Dairy Workers in Los Angeles, No. 5 of Alaska Cannery Workers in San Francisco, No. 18 of Shed Workers in Salinas, and No. 29 of Citrus Workers in Santa Ana (chartered from the former A.F. of L. No. 20539 and local Mexican C.U.C.O.M.) appeared to be active. No. 58 of Modesto, No. 233 of Brentwood, No. 23 of Camarillo, No. 24 of Chowchilla, and No. 203 of Lodi were newly chartered locals which developed from spontaneous strikes described above.⁸

The A.F. of L., by comparison, had reached unprecedented strength in agriculture and allied industries. The proceedings of the California State Federation for 1938 listed the following affiliates, claiming a total membership of 65,000 to 75,000:

Cannery Workers: 16 local unions with an estimated 50-60,000 members in the localities of Antioch, Benicia, Hayward, Kingsburg, Marysville, Modesto, Oakland, Oroville, Richmond, Rio Vista, Sacramento, Salinas, San Francisco, San Jose, Stockton, and Suisun.

Citrus Fruit-Packing and Byproducts Workers: 6 local unions in Corona, Ontario, Pasadena, Puente, and Upland.

Fruit and Vegetable Packing and Preserve Workers: 5 local unions in Oakland, Salinas, San Francisco, San Jose, and Santa Maria.

Dairy and Creamery Employees: 3 local unions in Fresno, Lemoore, and San Francisco.

Winery and Distillery Workers: 3 local unions in Fresno, Lodi, and Morgan Hill.⁹

Farm-Labor Unionism in 1939

Agricultural laborers' strikes during 1939 were fewer in number but larger in scope than they had been for some years. A few even approached the extent and violence reached in the campaign of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union in 1933. This revival of unionism was only temporary, however. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A., the main field workers' organization in California, continued to decline. A newly established independent union of Filipino workers in central California won the most important organization gains in the State during 1939. The A.F. of L. meanwhile remained inactive among field laborers.

Activities of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A.

SPONTANEOUS STRIKES

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. attempted to restrict its strike activities and to concentrate on building a stable organization based on the processing industries. Though on several occasions it felt forced to give support to spontaneous strikes, on the whole it exerted a moderating influence on labor relations in the fields. Several walk-outs it ignored completely.

The first strike in which the union was active occurred early in April among several hundred pea pickers in the vicinity of Modesto (Stanislaus County). Two hundred workers meeting in a Federal labor camp near Westley elected a committee of 5 to negotiate with growers for an increased picking rate of 30 cents per hamper in place of the prevailing 25

⁸Labor Herald, Sacramento, December 29, 1938.

⁹Proceedings of California State Federation of Labor, 1938 (pp. 41-45).

cents. They threatened to strike if the demands were not met.¹⁰ Fifteen or twenty members of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A., however, opposed calling a strike until a majority of the workers had been organized into the union. Overriding this opposition, some 240 nonunion workers under a "gentlemen's agreement" refrained from picking and sent delegates to several labor camps in the pea-growing area in an effort to extend the walk-out.¹¹ Several hundred pickers, representing about a third of the total employed in the area, finally joined the movement. The strike soon collapsed because of inadequate preparation.¹²

Another spontaneous movement developed among the pea workers late in September, when about 200 migratory pea pickers in a dozen ranches in the lower Santa Clara Valley near Gilroy struck unsuccessfully for a wage increase to 25 cents per hamper from the prevailing 21 cents.¹³

Small and unsuccessful strikes occurred in other crop areas during the year. Walk-outs of a few hundred fruit pickers in the vicinities of Patterson (Madera County), and Pittsburg (Contra Costa County) during June and July were broken by importation of strikebreakers. Two alleged agitators in one strike were arrested and held on \$500 bail on charges of violating the county antipicketing ordinance.¹⁴ An unsuccessful small strike of plum pickers in one orchard near Fresno was conducted under the leadership of a local independent union known as the Farm Workers Association. Its secretary-treasurer was Lillian Monroe, formerly an active left-wing organizer of the C.&A.W.I.U. during the San Joaquin Valley cotton strike of 1933. Two college students acting as pickets were jailed on charges of being "labor agitators * * * attempting to incite orchard workers to join the strike."¹⁵

ORCHARD STRIKES IN YUBA COUNTY

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. endeavored to build county-wide agricultural workers' unions which could work in close cooperation with other labor groups, particularly those of unemployed and relief clients in rural areas. The most important of these bodies was the Workers Alliance of America, which claimed 12,000 members in California in 1939.

The joint organizing efforts of the two unions in Yuba County led to serious labor-employer conflict in the peach orchards near Marysville. Early in May about 650 fruit workers (including spray men, peach thinners, irrigators, pear blight-control men, and general ranch laborers) carried out a brief strike. It began as a spontaneous walk-out on the Dantoni and New England orchards of the Earl Fruit Co., in protest against the resignation of a foreman who had refused to hire Filipinos to replace whites.¹⁶ When the unions took control, they enlarged the strike and made additional demands. Organizers extended the walk-out to three other large orchards in the area in an unsuccessful effort to raise wage levels from 25 to 30 cents per hour for general labor, and from 30 to 38 $\frac{9}{10}$ cents per hour for skilled work.¹⁷ The dispute was settled when the company agreed to rehire strikers without discrimination.

¹⁰Sacramento Union, April 14, 1939.

¹¹Stockton Record, April 14, 1939.

¹²San Francisco Chronicle, April 15, 1939.

¹³San Rafael Independent, September 28, 1939.

¹⁴Stockton Record, June 30, 1939; San Francisco Examiner, July 29, 1939.

¹⁵San Francisco Examiner, May 9, 1939.

¹⁶Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 48 (p. 17556); Sacramento Rec. May 6, 1939.

¹⁷Idem, Part 48 (pp. 17539, 17545-17546).

Conflict broke out anew 2 months later, when the Earl Fruit Co. was alleged to have applied a lock-out against union members. The revived Marysville local of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A (the reorganized local Workers Alliance) established picket lines in protest against the replacement of union members by white and oriental strikebreakers employed to harvest pears and nectarines.

The strike was easily broken by the county sheriff. Twenty-two pickets, including the more active union organizers, were arrested for violating the county antipicketing ordinance. The management of the Earl Fruit Co. refused Governor Olson's offer to mediate the dispute, choosing instead to hire enough strikebreakers to harvest the crop.¹⁸

COTTON STRIKE, SAN JOAQUIN

The Workers Alliance had been active also among agricultural workers in southern and central California. Local government officials in Santa Barbara County complained that Alliance organizers were interfering with the county agricultural commissioner's program to ban itinerant labor and harvest the pea crop with resident pickers taken from SRA rolls. On one occasion, it was reported, the county SRA coordinator recruited a truck load of pickers but Workers Alliance "agitators" persuaded them to leave the truck.¹⁹

The combined organizing efforts of the Workers Alliance and the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in the cotton fields of the San Joaquin Valley resulted in the most violent agricultural labor conflict of 1939. Wages and employment conditions in this crop still tended to generate more than ordinary labor unrest.

Wage rates set by organized growers under the auspices of the Agricultural Labor Bureau of the San Joaquin Valley had varied considerably from year to year in the cotton-growing industry. They had been raised immediately after the militant campaign of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union in the early thirties. Cotton choppers had been paid \$1.15 per acre in 1934 as compared with 72 cents in 1933. The collapse of the C.&A.W.I.U., the disorganization of farm laborers, and reported discriminatory relief policies which favored the growers' interests all served to reduce wages in following years. By 1936 the rate for cotton chopping had fallen to 75 cents per acre or 20 cents per hour. During 1937, a peak prosperity year, the rates were raised again, this time to \$1 per acre or 25 cents per hour.²⁰

This situation, however, did not last beyond that year. Cotton cultivation had been increasing steadily—from 130,000 acres in 1924 to 670,000 acres in 1937. This was reduced drastically to 340,000 acres during the following 2 years, under the restrictive program of the AAA. Demand for labor was thus being reduced at the same time that its supply was increasing rapidly. The influx of drought refugees to California was reaching unprecedented proportions, and they were supplemented by unemployed who were being displaced from urban industries in a period of general business recession. A doubly burdensome problem of underemployment and declining wage rates faced cotton choppers and pickers in the State. Chopping rates declined to 75 cents per acre or 20 cents per

¹⁸Sacramento Union, July 18, 1939; Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 48 (pp. 17594-17614, 17638-17641).

¹⁹Los Angeles Times, March 18, 1939.

²⁰Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 51 (pp. 18578-18584).

hour in 1938. In the fall of that year, as described before, an abortive strike of pickers had broken out in Kern County.

The Workers Alliance had been organizing seasonal workers in cotton and other crops in the San Joaquin Valley for several years. Since relief was the chief livelihood of many seasonal agricultural workers during the off-season months, some such organization as the Alliance represented almost their sole hope for attaining any degree of security and self-protection. When the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. established locals in the valley, Alliance members were transferred to them during the chopping and harvesting seasons.

The two labor unions became influential among agricultural workers in the San Joaquin Valley from 1937 to 1939, as relief authorities cooperated closely with growers belonging to the Agricultural Labor Bureau. Labor spokesmen complained almost continually that clients were being cut off from relief and thereby forced to work at "starvation" wages.²¹ As already noted the SRA, through cutting clients off relief during the harvest season, had helped to break the spontaneous strike of several thousand cotton pickers in 1938. In spite of this evidence of labor unrest, or perhaps because of the relative ease with which the strike had been broken, grower-employers at their annual conference in Fresno, in April 1939, again adopted the 1938 wage scales for cotton chopping.

Labor dissatisfaction with the wage situation became widespread. The Workers Alliance requested the right to be represented at the wage-setting convention. When this was ignored, the union held a mass meeting in Madera to agitate for a wage increase to 30 cents per hour or \$1.25 per acre. Though it did not declare a formal strike, the Alliance tried to discourage relief clients from chopping cotton at the current rates. Growers meanwhile exerted pressure on relief officials to drop clients from the rolls so that they would be available to work at the 20 cents per hour scale.

Governor Olson finally appointed a committee of State officials to investigate the cotton-wage situation. Chairman Carey McWilliams' report on May 12, 1939, condemned the rate of 20 cents per hour or 75 cents per acre for chopping, as not representing "even a subsistence wage." A minimum scale of 27½ cents per hour or \$1.25 per acre was recommended.²²

The Associated Farmers of California strongly criticized the indirect intervention of the State government. The executive committee stated on May 26, 1939:

Farmers want to pay the highest wages conditions will permit, but an arbitrary wage fixed by some governmental agency would be disastrous because prices received for crops cannot be controlled by the farmers. The State is also powerless to control the numerous conditions inside and outside California which determine prices received for agricultural products.

Attempts by the State to fix agricultural wages will place farmers at a further disadvantage in selling in eastern markets in competition with other producing areas paying less than half the present level in California, and having a much shorter haul to the major markets, and will put more California farmers out of business and add further to unemployment. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 51, p. 18897.)

²¹Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 51 (pp. 18603-18605).

²²Idem (pp. 18633 and 18969).

More serious labor trouble developed during the cotton-picking season in the fall of 1939. Late in August the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was reported as entering the San Joaquin Valley to cooperate with the Workers Alliance. The unions jointly held mass meetings and launched an organization campaign to draft and enforce wage increases in the forthcoming cotton harvests.²³ Wage demands were set at \$1.25 and \$1.50 per hundredweight for first and second pickings, as against the prevailing 65 to 75 cents. When growers refused to meet union negotiating committees, the demands were printed and distributed widely among pickers.

A local strike, authorized at a relatively small union meeting, began in the vicinity of Madera. It rapidly developed into a series of spontaneous strikes involving several thousand cotton pickers over a wide area, on a scale approaching the strike of 1933. The movement became too large for the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. to control and coordinate effectively. Both grower and labor representatives estimated that by mid-October almost 90 percent of the pickers in Madera County were affected.²⁴ A field agent of the Associated Farmers reported that—

The present situation constitutes the worst agricultural strike in the State since 1933, although to date we have played it down for obvious reasons. However, we plan to break loose on it now as we cannot hurt the situation by giving it the works in certain areas. (Hearings, Part 51, pp. 18653-18654.)

The strikers faced strong violence and intimidation from growers and local authorities. There was wholesale eviction of strikers from their cabins and armed vigilantes attacked pickets.²⁵ In Madera County 142 pickers were arrested on "John Doe" warrants, for violating the anti-caravan ordinance which prohibited automobile caravans without a county permit, but they were later released when the district attorney explained that they had not engaged in violence and intimidation, and that "the offense of which they appear guilty is trivial."²⁶ Judge Campbell Beaumont issued a temporary injunction in November to restrain authorities in Madera County from enforcing the antipicketing ordinance.²⁷

Tactics employed by both groups were patterned closely after those of 1933. Strikers endeavored to extend the walk-out by forming flying squadrons of pickets who traveled by auto caravan from ranch to ranch. Farmers organized a growers' emergency committee, which planned similar caravans which could converge on any picketed ranch to counteract the efforts of the strikers.²⁸

There were occasional violent outbreaks between organized growers and strikers. Fights between flying squadrons from both sides occurred at picketed ranches and cotton gins, in the course of which clubs were used and guns displayed by growers. Several strikers reported to the county hospital for treatment of wounds and bruises.²⁹ One fight between cotton growers and pickets in the Dairyland district sent nine strikers to the hospital with minor injuries. The growers claimed that the fight began when a group of pickets went into a field to intimidate 30 non-striking pickers.³⁰ The most serious riot occurred in the Madera County

²³Fresno Bee, August 26, 1939.

²⁴Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 51 (pp. 18633-18634, 18654).

²⁵Oakland Post Enquirer, October 24, 1939.

²⁶Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 51 (pp. 18640-18643, 18694).

²⁷Daily Worker, November 12, 1939.

²⁸Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 51 (p. 18664).

²⁹Idem (pp. 18667-18669, 18922).

³⁰San Francisco Examiner, October 20, 1939.

Park. Several dozen strikers and spectators were injured, 12 seriously enough to require hospital treatment, when 300 vigilantes broke up a mass meeting of strikers.³¹

Governor Olson, previous to the outbreak, had incurred the resentment of growers by appointing a Cotton Wage Hearing Board to air the issues under dispute and to seek terms for settlement of the strike. The State highway patrol meanwhile was dispatched to the Madera trouble center to "escort" and protect caravans of pickets.³² Growers held a mass meeting of protest in Madera on October 25, 1939. Speakers served Colonel Henderson, representing Governor Olson, with an ultimatum to the effect that if the strike leaders were not imprisoned and picketing prevented, the growers would take the law into their own hands. As one representative expressed it, "We will be the law!" They planned to break up by force a forthcoming strike meeting in Madera County Park.³³ Some 300 growers armed with clubs and rubber hoses invaded the park the following day and forcefully disrupted the gathering. The State highway patrol fired tear-gas bombs into the crowd to quiet the melee.³⁴

The strike subsided, after several weeks, into a series of local actions. The publicity attending the Cotton Wage Hearing Board rendered both groups more willing to compromise. U.C.A.P.A.W.A. spokesmen reported that cotton pickers in Madera County were returning to work by groups, as one grower after another broke away from the standards of the Associated Farmers and the Agricultural Labor Bureau and accepted the union compromise wage offer of \$1 per hundredweight. In many places, however, strike and picketing activities continued for months.

Filipino Agricultural Labor Association

One of the most notable labor developments during 1939 and 1940 was the revival of independent, race-conscious unionism among the Filipinos in central California, particularly in the asparagus- and celery-growing areas of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys.

The divisions of opinion regarding labor unionism and other questions within Filipino communities of California had become deeper and more complex as C.I.O.-A.F. of L. conflict was intensified from late 1937 onward. The majority of unionized Filipinos tended to be partial to the C.I.O. because of its "sincerity in internationalism," to quote one observer. Several Filipinos had been elected to fill executive posts in C.I.O. unions and to act as delegates at national conventions. The A.F. of L., on the other hand, had, it was reported, consistently opposed the immigration of Filipinos and tried to exclude them from organized trades.³⁵

The more articulate elements in Filipino communities favored a separate racial labor movement which would remain unaffiliated with either the A.F. of L. or C.I.O. The Philippines Mail of Salinas, one of the important language papers of this group, stated the separatist view in an editorial in its issue of December 6, 1937:

³¹Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 51 (p. 18922).

³²San Francisco Examiner, October 23, 1939.

³³Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 51 (pp. 18678-18680).

³⁴Idem (pp. 18748, 18755-18756, 18922).

³⁵Philippines Mail, Vol. 8, No. 19, May 13, 1938.

The Mail is convinced that the A.F. of L. has for its basic purpose the elimination of Filipino labor in the American scene; it is likewise convinced that the C.I.O. is only a temporary emotional flare-up and that its leadership may soon revert back to the A.F. of L. * * * Should it be necessary to organize U. S. Filipinos into a union, the Mail is sympathetic to the suggestion of an independent Filipino union. The Mail believes and maintains that the Filipino workman in the United States is a distinct factor as a labor unit. It offers no unfair competition with any of the existing American organized labor. It keeps its own standard of efficiency and productiveness acceptable to its employer and, because of that, it can place its own values based on that efficiency and productiveness. * * * Filipino labor can sell on its own merits without involving itself in partisan quarrels between the A.F. of L. and C.I.O.

The successful organization of Filipinos in the independent P.I. Labor Union incorporated in the Santa Maria Valley of Santa Barbara County appeared to justify the Mail's assertions. In cooperation with the local independent Mexican Labor Union, this organization in February 1939 again negotiated an agreement providing union recognition, preferential hiring, a minimum wage of 35 cents per hour for field labor, overtime rates, special working conditions, and a representative grievance board to settle disputes.³⁶

Independent racial unionism among Filipinos won added support when the Philippine Islands gained a more independent status from the United States Government. Late in 1936 President Quezon appointed the Hon. Francisco Varona, member of the National Economic Council, as Resident Commissioner of the United States. His main function was "to uphold the dignity of the new nation and to take care of nationals abroad."³⁷ Mr. Varona expressed the view that Filipino workers should not join either the A.F. of L. or C.I.O., but should form independent unions closely bound to the Philippines Government through the Resident Labor Commissioner's office.³⁸

The Filipino community was receptive to the views of the new Resident Commissioner, who offered a means for unifying conflicting tribal and occupational groups. Filipino businessmen and contractors stood to gain by organizing stronger associations not only among themselves, but among the workers also, since the economic interests of the two groups were interdependent. If both could be unified in one organization, the bargaining position of each would be strengthened for dealing with grower-employers. A writer in the Philippines Mail of March 15, 1940, stated the main issues as follows:

Conflicting group interests surround the social and economic life of the Filipino community. * * * Certain elements * * * have assumed the power to represent Filipino labor without giving the workers a voice in determining the terms and conditions under which they work and live * * *.

No one questions the sincerity and honesty of every contractor as a labor leader to help the workers advance themselves beyond a mere primitive stage of existence. But his relation with the company or employer, and his constant fear of cutthroat labor competition, which is so widely practised among his fellow contractors, make

³⁶Field notes.

³⁷Philippines Mail, Vol. 7, No. 20, April 12, 1937.

³⁸C. D. Mensalves, Filipino president of the C.I.O. Industrial Union Council of Guadalupe, was highly critical of this view. He pointed out that Filipinos had made their greatest gains in C.I.O. unions, particularly those organized among Alaska cannery workers. (Commonwealth Times, Vol. 1, No. 24, Dec. 21, 1937.)

it impossible for him to defend the rights of the workers in time of labor disputes or grievances.³⁹

The Resident Labor Commissioner proved to be a very effective agent for the welding diverse elements of the Filipino community together and organizing wage earners and labor contractors for the purpose of collective bargaining. Early in March 1938 he called a conference of representatives from all Filipino organizations on the Pacific Coast⁴⁰ to establish an independent union of Filipinos. The delegates favored a bilateral association that would include both occupational groups in the unorganized Salinas and Sacramento Valley districts.

As a result the Filipino Agricultural Workers Association of San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys was established; it included 6,000 Filipino laborers and contractors engaged chiefly in asparagus work. The executive council was made up of prominent civic leaders of the Filipino communities of Stockton and Sacramento who were considered to have the status required for bargaining effectively with employers. It was designed to include the best features of the Philippine Islands Labor Union Incorporated of Guadalupe and the Filipino Labor Supply Association of Stockton.⁴¹

The new organization first turned its attention to improving the Filipino workers' position in the asparagus industry, where labor relations were most chaotic and unsatisfactory. According to a reporter in the *Philippines Mail* of April 7, 1939—

The F.A.W.A. was formed under the pressure of deplorable conditions existing in the asparagus area, where wages for cutting asparagus were lowered from the 1938 scale; where contracts entered into between asparagus employers and the Filipino labor contractors were found to be one-sided in favor of employers, and in almost all cases in violation of the labor laws that apply; and where camp housing, in almost 99 cases out of 100, are in violation of the labor code.

The F.A.W.A.'s two principal demands were: (1) Restoration of the 1938 wage scale retroactively as of March 1, 1939, or from the commencement of the 1939 harvest season, and (2) a revised, uniform, and model contract mutually drawn and agreed upon by employers and employees, bargaining collectively through their own representatives. A strike was to be declared against those employer-growers who refused to accede to the union's demands.⁴²

The F.A.W.A.'s initial difficulty lay in the fact that the 250-odd asparagus growers themselves were not sufficiently well organized to carry on collective bargaining. The contractor system of recruiting and paying labor had led to competitive individual bargaining agreements among contractors and growers. This had caused a conspicuous lack of uniformity in wage rates and labor conditions throughout the growing area. No two contracts were alike and, according to labor spokesmen, almost

³⁹A brief submitted to a conference of Filipino organizations stressed further points of weakness in the labor contractor's position:

"The common practice is employment of farm-hand contractors who act as conciliators between laborers and employers. This practice has been most effective, especially in the Salinas Valley where labor enjoys a paternalistic relationship with farm-hand contractors. These contractors on the other hand represent the best interests of their laborers to their employers.

"The only objectionable feature of the system is that the labor-contractor system is not recognized by law and consequently has no legal standing before the courts in case of disputes. The term 'labor contractor' is a trade name which applies to labor agents recruiting laborers for employers and operating under the 'Employment Agency Law.' The labor contractors do not enjoy the full protection of the law, while the laborers they recruit for the employers do." (*Philippines Mail*, Vol. 8, No. 14, Apr. 4, 1938.)

⁴⁰*Philippines Mail*, Vol. 8, No. 12, March 14, 1938.

⁴¹*Idem*, Vol. 9, No. 1, August 30, 1939.

⁴²*Idem*, Vol. 8, No. 35, April 7, 1939.

all of them violated the law. Variations in crop conditions likewise militated against standardization of wage rates and conditions and favored individual work contracts.⁴³

The unorganized and competitive position of asparagus growers left them ill-equipped to resist the labor organization. The union, now renamed the Filipino Agricultural Labor Association, or F.A.L.A., won a resounding victory in its first strike in April 1939. As this was the first time in the history of this crop area that Filipino laborers had been organized on an inclusive scale, the strike caught the grower-employers by surprise.

The walk-out extended throughout the Delta region of San Joaquin, Sacramento, Contra Costa, and Yolo Counties. It affected about half the total asparagus crop, separate union contracts having been signed previously with the six largest growers in the region.⁴⁴ It was called just when the asparagus crop was reaching peak production. In the words of the Stockton Record of April 7, 1939, the strike—

* * * virtually paralyzed more than one-half of one of the richest agricultural industries of California, leaving at least 40,000 acres of rapidly growing "grass" uncut and rotting in the fields. * * *

* * * Grower representatives, openly at a loss because of the surprising show of strength and unity by their workers, were considering immediate capitulation as the only alternative to suffering losses running into hundreds of thousands of dollars and possible ruin for the remainder of the crop-year.

The strike ended within 1 day with an almost complete victory for the F.A.L.A. Of the 258 growers employing a total of 4,000 to 5,000 workers, all but 2, hiring some 200 cutters, had acceded to union demands,⁴⁵ and these capitulated shortly afterward.

The complete absence of picketing or violence was unusual for a strike involving such large numbers. The Filipinos had a monopoly of the labor supply in asparagus because they were the only group sufficiently skilled and adapted to perform the gruelling and specialized work required. When almost all the asparagus workers were organized into the F.A.L.A., they had merely to refrain from going to work to make the strike completely effective. Efforts to import whites, Negroes, and Mexicans to replace the Filipinos failed.⁴⁵

Unusual also was the sympathetic, or at least neutral and unbiased, attitude of the newspapers of the Stockton and San Francisco Bay areas. Said Dr. Macario Bautista, president of the F.A.L.A.:

I am very happy to report that the attitude of the American public was one of friendliness to and sympathy with our cause. The press, too, was friendly to us; in fact, the attitude of the Stockton Record on this particular occasion was unprecedented in American journalism in so far as the Filipinos are concerned. (Philippines Mail, Vol. 8, No. 36, April 22, 1939.)

A Filipino Labor Association was organized in Sacramento County, patterned after the F.A.L.A. in Stockton, following the initial strike success.⁴⁶ Filipino labor agents and contractors agreed to delegate to the

⁴³As one union official pointed out, the disparity of conditions tended to create confusion in union demands. An increase of 5 cents per hour over the 1938 wage scales could not be made a blanket increase to cover every age and condition of the "grass" because of the peculiarity of the crop. Many factors, such as soil conditions, productivity of beds, etc., had to be considered. Thus a price of \$1 per 100 pounds for 5-year old "grass" in one bed might be too low for the same age of grass in a bed in which there were too many "spots," or ground in which there was no "grass," or a bed in which the soil was too hard. For these reasons asparagus wages almost necessarily had to be determined individually for each camp.

⁴⁴San Francisco Examiner, April 8, 1939.

⁴⁵Stockton Independent, April 8, 1939.

⁴⁶Philippines Mail, Vol. 9, No. 1, August 30, 1939.

association authority to represent them and the laborers under their jurisdiction, in negotiations with grower-employers.⁴⁷ The Sacramento union late in September won a favorable collective-bargaining contract with the Japanese Tomato Growers Association, providing for a raise in minimum wages to a scale of 35 cents per hour from the previous level of 25 to 27½ cents paid to some 1,500 Filipino field laborers.⁴⁸

The F.A.L.A. of Stockton meanwhile was extending its organization to other crop areas in which Filipinos were employed. Late in September approximately 250 members of the association in the Concord area of Contra Costa County struck for an increase of 5 cents per hour, to a 35-cent minimum to be paid by Japanese pea and tomato farmers.⁴⁹ Filipinos in Santa Clara County were reported to be organized into a union for the first time, in a local of the F.A.L.A.⁵⁰ The association temporarily planned to organize the grape industry of central California, concentrated in the vicinities of Fresno, Porterville, Delano, and Bakersfield. There some 7,000 Filipinos were employed, earning a pay roll of about \$90,000 weekly.⁵¹

The F.A.L.A. attained only partial success in its next strike. This began late in October 1939, with a spontaneous walk-out of 363 Filipino and 20 Mexican brussels-sprouts pickers in the vicinity of Pescadero (San Mateo County). They demanded a wage increase of 5 cents per hour to the 35-cent level won in other crop areas. The F.A.L.A. enrolled the strikers in a local which already had a number of members employed in the area. The rank and file elected their own local union officers.⁵¹

A deadlock developed in negotiations between union representatives and growers. The F.A.L.A. office in Stockton notified Commissioner Varona, who requested the U.S. Department of Labor to send a conciliator. The latter, meeting with F.A.L.A. president Bautista and a committee of growers' and workers' representatives, suggested temporary arbitration and investigation of the feasibility of a 35-cent scale. This the growers refused on the ground that they could not afford to pay such a wage. They offered, as a counterproposal, to sign a contract recognizing the F.A.L.A. and agreeing to pay the 35-cent wage if and when the price of brussels sprouts reached 5 cents per pound. This in turn was refused by the strikers.

A week after the dispute began, the workers returned to their jobs on 27 brussels-sprouts ranches at the original wage scale. The strike was reported to have been broken through the importation of about 150 Mexicans and a few whites and Negroes from Stockton's "skid-row."⁵¹

The strike broke out anew and on a larger scale in mid-December, when 500 workers organized in the F.A.L.A. and supported by Local No. 20 of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in Stockton struck for the same wage demands as before. Some violence occurred, including the shooting of two Filipino pickets and the stoning of several Mexican strike-breakers.⁵²

A compromise wage increase of 3 cents per hour plus free housing for the workers ended the walk-out after 1 week. The growers agreed further to reemploy all strikers without discrimination for union affiliations.⁵³ Details of the settlement were worked out at a joint conference called by Walter Mathewson, Federal Conciliator.⁵⁴

⁴⁷Philippines Mail, Vol. 9, No. 3, September 30, 1939.

⁴⁸Commonwealth Times, September 30, 1939.

⁴⁹Stockton Record, September 22, 1939.

⁵⁰Philippines Mail, Vol. I, No. 4, October 16, 1939.

⁵¹Philippines Journal, Stockton, Vol. 1, No. 8, November 11, 1939 (p. 1).

⁵²Idem; also San Francisco Examiner, December 17, 1939.

⁵³San Francisco Examiner, December 21, 1939.

⁵⁴Idem; also Philippines Mail, Vol. 9, No. 9, December 22, 1939.

The F.A.L.A. won a more important victory in the celery-growing areas around Pescadero (San Mateo County), Terminous, Holt, Orwood, and other Delta centers. Here also the F.A.L.A. cooperated with U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Local No. 20 of Stockton in seeking to establish union recognition and a general wage increase to the minimum scale of 35 cents per hour. Large numbers of Filipinos employed during the winter months in this crop area were also members of U.C.A.P.A.W.A. fish-cannery unions of Seattle, Portland, and San Francisco. Nonunion Filipinos signed pledges authorizing the F.A.L.A. to represent them in collective-bargaining relations with grower-employers.⁵⁵

Filipino celery workers in the area were almost all organized by late fall. The two organizations, F.A.L.A. and U.C.A.P.A.W.A., jointly requested that grower-shippers meet with union representatives to negotiate a schedule of union demands. When this was ignored, Dr. Bautista, Stockton president of the F.A.L.A., called a strike. The resulting walk-out of 2,700 workers stopped operations completely in dozens of celery fields and packing sheds in the Delta area.

The strike involved remarkably little violence considering the numbers involved and the well-organized resistance of the grower-shippers. The Daily Worker claimed that "the antilabor Associated Farmers through so-called 'emergency committees' is trying sporadically to run small numbers of Japanese into the area for strikebreaking."⁵⁶ The Oakland Tribune reported that large numbers of strikers were being evicted from their cabins and that the growers were inviting white migrants and local Japanese to take their places.⁵⁷

U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Local No. 221 of Stockton was forced to sever its official connection with the F.A.L.A. during the strike, when a spokesman of the A.F. of L. threatened the grower-shippers with a "hot cargo" boycott of agricultural products if they signed an agreement with a C.I.O. union. The A.F. of L. earlier had moved to support the celery workers in order to "forestall the C.I.O. courtship of the independent Filipino Agricultural Laborers Association."⁵⁸

The strike ended in less than a week with an almost complete victory for the union. It won an agreement incorporating most of its original demands:

- (1) Recognition of the F.A.L.A. as bargaining agent;
- (2) 5-cent hourly wage increase over the prevailing scale of 25 cents to 30 cents per hour for field and packing-shed workers;
- (3) 10-hour day and time and a half for overtime;
- (4) Reinstatement of all strikers without discrimination;
- (5) Seniority rights for workers, providing job preference next year for those now employed;
- (6) Improved housing conditions, with no charge for rent, fuel and light.⁵⁹

Less than a week after the settlement of this strike, another walk-out included about 500 Filipinos employed at garlic planting in the vicinity of Hollister. Organized in a separate Filipino Agricultural Workers Union, they sought to enforce the standard union demand of a 5-cent hourly increase to the 35-cent scale. They were unsuccessful, however, as the walk-out was defeated by wholesale importation of Mexican strike-breakers.⁶⁰

⁵⁵Philippines Mail, Vol. 9, No. 5, November 11, 1939.

⁵⁶Daily Worker, November 30, 1939.

⁵⁷Oakland Tribune, December 1, 1939.

⁵⁸Idem, December 1, 1939; Philippines Mail, Vol. 9, No. 9, December 22, 1939.

⁵⁹San Francisco News, December 4, 1939; Philippines Journal, Vol. 1, No. 8, November 11, 1939.

⁶⁰San Francisco News, December 29, 1939.

The F.A.L.A. was unable during 1940 to maintain in full the gains that it had won through strike action in the celery and asparagus crops of the Sacramento Delta region. Like other Filipino organizations the union to some degree was disrupted by intertribal jealousies.⁶¹ It met more serious reverses from grower-shippers, who were better organized and prepared now that the union had lost the initial advantage of surprise. The *Philippines Journal*, official organ of the F.A.L.A., charged that growers were attempting to destroy the association by refusing to hire its members in asparagus and celery cutting. Union spokesmen inveighed against "Japanese activities in meddling with Pinoy labor."⁶² Grocerymen and merchants, many of whom were Japanese, were reported as obtaining concessions in asparagus camps, placing their own nonunion men in jobs, and requiring the men to buy their provisions exclusively from them. Japanese interests were also charged with turning growers against the F.A.L.A., and urging them to hire their Filipino workers from the anti-union Filipino Federation of America, whose members were pledged not to strike.⁶³

Similar unsatisfactory labor conditions in the Delta celery-growing area around Terminous finally resulted in a general or cropwide walk-out called by the F.A.L.A. in 1940. This was the only agricultural field workers' strike of importance in the United States during that year.

The growers under the leadership of the Associated Farmers of California were much better organized to combat Filipino farm-labor unions than they had been the previous year. Harvesting and packing were continued by Japanese and Filipino strikebreakers recruited through two main sources, the Filipino Federation of America and an employment agency operated by Mrs. R. S. Morimoto, local Japanese golf star.⁶³

Two weeks after calling the strike, the F.A.L.A., claiming to represent some 7,000 field workers in the Stockton area and almost 30,000 throughout the State, voted to affiliate with the A.F. of L. The union hoped in this way to enlist sympathetic strike support from strategically placed A.F. of L. organizations, particularly those in the transportation and canning industries. An A.F. of L. charter as a federal labor union was granted the F.A.L.A., permitting it to enroll all agricultural workers regardless of race or nationality. The union meanwhile filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board against the organized grower-shippers.⁶⁴

Negotiations reached a stalemate when the F.A.L.A. rejected a contract proposed by the grower-shippers. The union, however, compromised in its demands for an outright closed shop; it was willing to accept

⁶¹Filipinos in the United States are represented by three main tribal groups—the Visayans, the Tagalogs, and the Ilicanos. While the latter groups constitute the numerical majority, the more prominent leaders in the community usually belong to the minority represented by the first group, and this situation sometimes leads to friction. It was reported, for instance, that an aspirant for the office of president of the F.A.L.A. stated at a meeting that "the majority of Filipinos here are Ilicanos, and we Ilicanos should have a fearless Ilicano in the F.A.L.A. office to look after Ilicano interests." The *Philippines Journal* in a critical editorial replied in a more nationalistic vein: "You can no longer appeal to the Pinoy [Filipino] from the sectional standpoint. The F.A.L.A. is not an organization for Visayans, Ilicanos, or Tagalogs. It is an organization for Filipinos only!" (*Philippines Journal* Vol. 2, No. 3, Feb. 15, 1940.)

⁶²*Philippines Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 3, February 15, 1940, p. 2.

⁶³Stockton Record, November 11, 1940.

⁶⁴San Francisco Examiner, November 12, 1940.

a preferential hiring agreement providing that all Filipinos employed during the 1939 season be reinstated.

The strike became more critical when A.F. of L. representatives took over negotiations for the strikers. The Teamsters Union moved to declare the struck celery "hot." A meeting was held between representatives of organized growers and A.F. of L. unions, including the special A.F. of L. organizer of cannery and agricultural workers in California, the president of the San Joaquin County General Labor Council, and an official of the Teamsters Union. Final application of the "hot cargo" policy was postponed pending negotiations between I. B. Padway, attorney for the A.F. of L., and the legal counsel for organized grower-shippers. When these negotiations failed, the A.F. of L. reinforced the picket lines around celery fields and packing sheds in the Terminus area and definitely declared San Joaquin County celery to be "hot."⁶⁵ After several weeks the strike was finally settled on a compromise basis.

Recent Developments in Agriculture and Allied Industries

Activities of U.C.A.P.A.W.A.

The revived militancy and broadened range of the farm-labor movement during 1939 did not last long. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. (C.I.O.), a union devoted to the organizing of field agriculture's "forgotten millions," had carried out a costly and extensive organizing campaign in scattered rural areas during 1937-39, and had taken over the leadership of numerous ill-planned spontaneous strikes. A drastically reduced budget forced the national organization to restrict its activities throughout the country to those processing industries that were accessible to union headquarters in metropolitan centers.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. had faced the initial disadvantage in California of loss of control over those industries, particularly fruit and vegetable canning, to the A.F. of L. and its affiliated National Council of Agricultural and Cannery Workers. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. lost further ground during 1940 as the A.F. of L. extended its activities to rural areas and the organizing of field workers. Besides a few small spontaneous walk-outs that passed unnoticed in newspapers, two important field workers' strikes occurred in the State during 1940 and 1941; these were both led by affiliates of the A.F. of L.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. early in 1940 had publicly announced an ambitious organizing campaign for California's agricultural workers, following its partial successes in the San Joaquin Valley cotton pickers' strike. A writer in the San Francisco News reported that the union was "growing faster than at any time in the history of agricultural organization in this State." Its growth was attributed in part to the large number of active organizers, including Spanish-speaking and Mexican officers in southern California. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. claimed in a news letter to have "11 locals in the San Joaquin Valley with more than 1,500 members * * * each local * * * reporting a steady increase of about 4 members a week." For the first time in its history, the union

⁶⁵Stockton Record, issues of December 3, 4, and 6, 1940.

stated, it was able to maintain an active membership during the off-season months from November to March.⁶⁶

Union locals in the past had usually dissolved at the end of each harvest season when workers had to move to other areas to find work. Under the U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s new organizing policy, the State was divided into eight agricultural districts, each having a large town as a center in which was located a key local with a permanent experienced leadership. The union's activities could then be carried on continuously in spite of the seasonal shifts of migratory workers.

The strongest key local was organized in Madera, center of the 1939 cotton pickers' strike. Another intensive organizing campaign was launched throughout the citrus belt of Tulare, Ventura, Orange, and Riverside Counties. The largest union membership in 1940 was reported in Orange County. The organization was active also in the celery and asparagus fields of the upper San Joaquin and lower Sacramento Valleys, where independently organized Filipino workers were entrenched. Here the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. optimistically claimed to have control of the Filipino Agricultural Laborers Association.⁶⁷

Renewed efforts resulted in an almost continuous series of defeats. A major setback occurred when the powerful independent Filipino Agricultural Laborers Association of Stockton—the largest field workers' union in California—joined the A.F. of L.'s National Council of Agricultural and Cannery Workers. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. previously had cooperated closely with the F.A.L.A. in several strikes and had counted ultimately upon winning its affiliation. Strategic control of vital truck transportation as well as fruit and vegetable canning, however, made the A.F. of L. a more useful partner for the organized Filipinos.

A U.C.A.P.A.W.A. affiliate won a temporary victory, followed by eventual defeat, in packing sheds of the Imperial Valley early in 1940. The C.I.O.'s Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union No. 18 had supplanted the A.F. of L.'s Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union No. 18211 in Salinas. When it extended its activities to the Imperial Valley early in 1939 it aroused the fears of local grower-shippers. The Associated Farmers of Imperial Valley began to prepare for a widespread lettuce strike, which was expected to develop as an outgrowth of the recent cotton strike in the San Joaquin Valley. Hugh Osborne, manager of the Associated Farmers of Imperial County, claimed that strike leaders at Madera had threatened to move the strike organization to the Imperial Valley.⁶⁷

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union, without calling a strike, won jurisdiction over the employees of four Imperial Valley packing companies in elections ordered by the regional National Labor Relations Board.⁶⁸

Later in the year the union began to lose ground to the A.F. of L. in this industry. Representatives of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Workers' Union in January 1941 demanded a closed-shop contract with grower-shippers of the Imperial Valley, in order to safeguard the U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s position. The union called a strike on January 25, 1941, after the employers refused its demands. Pickets were placed around numerous packing sheds.

⁶⁶San Francisco News, July 22, 1940.

⁶⁷Bakersfield Californian, October 25, 1939.

⁶⁸Los Angeles Examiner, February 14, 1940. The four packing companies were the Farley Fruit Co. of Calexico; Frank Morito Co. of Holtville; Bruce Church Co. of El Centro; and Smith Thornburg Co. of Holtville.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. apparently failed to organize a sufficiently large proportion of the packing-shed workers to make the strike effective. It faced strong opposition from the powerful A.F. of L. Teamsters Union as well as from organized grower-shipper interests. The strike was reported to have been repudiated by employees who voted by secret ballot at numerous packing sheds. Unorganized employees as well as members of the A.F. of L. Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union in some plants won temporary restraining orders against U.C.A.P.A.W.A. picket lines. Pickets on at least two occasions were arrested for violating these court injunctions.⁶⁹

By mid-February 1941, it was evident that the strike had failed. Picketing had ceased almost entirely. Virtually all packing sheds in the valley were reported functioning normally, while the NLRB investigated the conflicting jurisdictional claims of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. (C.I.O.) and the A.F. of L. Charles Copperman, head of the local Teamsters Union, claimed that 1,000 shed workers had signed with the A.F. of L. union.⁷⁰

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. finally abandoned the field early in 1941. It transferred as a "gift" to the A.F. of L. its one active organization of farm workers, a union of citrus-fruit pickers and packers in Ventura and adjoining counties.

Activities of A.F. of L.

The A.F. of L., through its Teamster-controlled National Council of Agricultural and Cannery Workers in California, as already noted, was improving its position in agriculture and allied industries at the expense of the C.I.O.-U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Said the weekly news letter of the A.F. of L. in January 14, 1939:

The progress we have made in this particular field is little short of remarkable. We have established 64 local unions of agricultural, cannery, and citrus workers. They number more than 21,305 workers.⁷¹

The California State Federation of Labor experienced local insurgent movements but they came to little. The first of these occurred in San Jose during April 1939. Of the normal force of 650 to 670 year-round workers in the Dried Fruit and Nut Packers Union, 465 voted

⁶⁹The Los Angeles Times of February 2, 1941, reported that packers from several plants affected by U.C.A.P.A.W.A. picketing gathered in a mass meeting sponsored by pastors of local churches and cast a secret ballot. Out of 812 balloting, 667 voted against the strike, 108 voted for it, and 37 votes were cast out for irregularities. Shed workers at three plants in Brawley and one in El Centro were also reported to have voted overwhelmingly against the strike in a secret ballot. After a vote of 37 to 4, the shed workers of the Western Fruit Growers Inc. raised funds to obtain a temporary restraining order against pickets. At the A. Arena & Co. shed in Brawley, also, the A.F. of L. Vegetable Workers Union filed a restraining injunction against the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. and demanded \$1,587.60 damages for wages lost to members as a result of the picket lines. (Los Angeles Times, Feb. 1, 1941.) Two pickets were arrested for violating these temporary restraining orders, and as a result U.C.A.P.A.W.A. district president, T. R. Rasmussen, requested a writ of prohibition from the State supreme court to cancel injunctions issued by Judge V. N. Thompson of Imperial County. (Los Angeles Examiner, Feb. 7, 1941.)

⁷⁰San Diego Sun, February 12, 1941. One incidental result of the strike, according to the San Diego Union, was a hastening of the adoption of new labor-saving handling and shipping methods, including dry packing and use of precooled cars. (San Diego Union, Feb. 7, 1941.)

⁷¹The disparity in membership figures between this statement and the previously estimated 50,000 to 60,000 in the northern California cannery unions alone, is to be explained by the high seasonality of employment in the industry. The 21,305 claimed in the news letter for 64 unions over the entire United States represent the stable year-round employees at work during the slack winter months. During the peak harvest and canning season of summer and fall the number employed, many of them under A.F. of L. jurisdiction, is multiplied several times.

three to one to disband as an A.F. of L. organization and to affiliate with the Warehousemen's Local Nos. 1-6 of the C.I.O. The union closed its A.F. of L. office and opened a new C.I.O. local union headquarters. In response to these moves, State federation secretary Vandeleur suspended the union officers and announced that the A.F. of L. local union headquarters was reopened under a new temporary set of officers.⁷²

All the important local cannery unions in northern California by early April 1939 had ratified the master agreement drawn up and signed by the State federation and the California Processors and Growers Association. The recalcitrance of Local No. 20325 of Santa Clara County ended when 500 members in a mass meeting ratified the master agreement.⁷³ Later in the year a contract granting a compromise wage increase was negotiated between the Stockton Cannery Workers Union Local No. 20676 and the Pacific Grape Products, which had experienced a strike the previous year.⁷⁴

The majority of A.F. of L. cannery unions in central and northern California in May 1940 voted to accept proposals submitted by the California Processors and Growers Association, representing 20 major plants employing about 50,000 workers. The agreement granted most of the unions' new demands, including vacations with pay and the establishment of occupational and pay classifications above the minimum-wage base.⁷⁵ It did not, however, meet the union demands for a 5-cent hourly wage increase and elimination of a 5-cent hourly differential in wage scales between urban and rural canneries.⁷⁶ An industry-wide strike was called over this issue during the 1941 season.

Meyer Lewis, west coast representative of the A.F. of L., announced in 1940 that the Federation would launch a unionizing campaign in canneries, dried fruit and nut packing industries, green fruits, cottonseed, vegetable oils, citrus, and citrus byproducts plants in southern California.⁷⁷

The A.F. of L. met considerable resistance in its attempts to apply the wage standards of northern California to the processing industries in southern counties. The union was unable to win its demands for a closed-shop contract and higher wages in citrus-fruit canneries in the Hemet Valley (Riverside County). Cannery operators refused to accept the union standards on the ground that the greater cost involved in packing smaller and lower-quality fruit, together with the higher transportation costs in serving more-isolated rural communities, rendered the companies unable to afford the wage scales paid by canneries in northern California.⁷⁸

The A.F. of L. expanded rapidly in membership among field workers in California during 1940 and 1941. Its major success lay in winning the affiliation of the Filipino Agricultural Laborers Association. Early in 1941 the A.F. of L. took part in the largest, most prolonged, and

⁷²San Jose Mercury Herald, April 23, 1939.

⁷³Idem, April 7, 1939. Critics of the A.F. of L. pointed out, however, that this vote represented only a fraction of the total membership, since it did not include the thousands seasonally employed during the summer months, who also came under the union's jurisdiction.

⁷⁴The union had asked an increase from 40 cents per hour for men and 35 cents for women to a level of 52½ and 44 cents, respectively. Under the compromise agreement wage scales were established at 47½ and 38½ cents, respectively, and all strikers and discriminatorily discharged workers were rehired. (Stockton Record, July 3, 1939.)

⁷⁵San Francisco News, May 1, 1940.

⁷⁶San Francisco Examiner, April 27, 1940.

⁷⁷San Francisco News, May 1, 1940.

⁷⁸Los Angeles Times, September 1, 1939.

highly publicized field workers' strike to occur in California for several years. The walk-out of several thousand citrus-fruit workers in Ventura County ultimately had repercussions throughout the State. The entrance of the Teamsters Union into the conflict again brought the "hot cargo" issue to the fore.

The strike, according to some reports, followed a "behind-the-scenes deal" between the A.F. of L. and the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. (C.I.O.). The U.C.A.P.A.W.A., faced with inadequate funds and a declining membership, was unable to continue its organizing drive in the citrus industry, where it had been competing for several years with the A.F. of L. Consequently it turned over its membership to the A.F. of L. Agricultural and Citrus Workers Union. "Pedro Pete" Peterson, former official of the International Longshoremen's Association, was appointed special organizer of the new union.

The strike apparently was called prematurely. One theory was that "Pedro Pete" feared that the C.I.O. intended to recapture the union after the A.F. of L. had spent much time and money in organizing the citrus workers. Also, the A.F. of L. organizers had intended to call a strike on only a few large ranches, the employees of which were well organized. The union hoped to win its demands for recognition, a 10-cent hourly increase in wages, and adjustment of "stand-by time" during inclement weather.

Union members constituted a small fraction of all citrus-fruit workers in the county. The strike in late January, nevertheless, "spread like wildfire," according to the Ventura Star Free Press of January 31, 1941. Many unorganized workers joined in a series of spontaneous walk-outs. Within a few days the movement involved approximately 1,500 pickers and packing-shed workers employed by cooperative growing and packing associations in the vicinities of Camarillo, Moorpark, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, and Saticoy. By the second week of February about 4,000 workers were affected.⁷⁹

The strike assumed particular significance when officers of the Agricultural and Citrus Workers Union demanded active support from other A.F. of L. affiliates, particularly the Brotherhood of Teamsters. E. Vandeleur, secretary, and C. J. Haggerty, president of the California State Federation of Labor, promised fullest support of the lemon pickers' collective-bargaining demands. A secondary boycott was announced, and teamsters were instructed not to handle lemons grown in Ventura County.⁸⁰ A byproducts plant in Corona whose employees were organized in the A.F. of L. also refused to handle Ventura County fruit.⁸¹ Union circles scouted the possibilities of applying the secondary boycott throughout the State and even to eastern markets.

Grower-employers and their supporters mobilized their forces to combat the threatened union progress. The Los Angeles Times of March 7, 1941, reported that "an alarm and rallying call was broadcast throughout California * * * for the support of agriculture against the A.F. of L. campaign to unionize farms and ranches." Representatives of the Associated Farmers and the Farm Bureau notified city government officials throughout the State that farmers collectively would refuse to buy from cities which did not keep farm-to-consumer routes open and free from "union molestation."⁸¹ Almon E. Roth, president of the San

⁷⁹Los Angeles Times, February 7, 1941.

⁸⁰Ventura Star Free Press, February 20, 1941.

⁸¹Los Angeles Times, February 23, 1941.

Francisco Employers Council, sent a wire to the organized citrus growers protesting the union's secondary boycott and promising to "do everything we possibly can to aid you [growers] in the distribution of your lemons in this area."⁸² Alfred J. Lundberg, president of the California State Chamber of Commerce, stated officially that—

* * * the Board of Directors went on record in favor of legislation to outlaw the secondary boycott and hot cargo. We are now in the process of throwing the full strength of our State-wide organization and our regional councils behind this proposed legislation. (Ventura Star Free Press, March 7, 1941.)

The strike itself meanwhile continued to grow. It became general in the Corona area early in March as pickers, packers, and truckers walked out of orchards and packing sheds of the Orange Heights and Corona Citrus Associations. Late in February a mass meeting of 1,000 growers in 28 citrus associations of Ventura County affiliated to the California Fruit Growers Exchange pledged a "fight to the finish" and made plans to recruit labor from all possible sources to replace strikers.⁸³

The State Relief Administration and the Federal Farm Security Administration opened offices in the county, the latter furnishing relief to strikers who were ineligible for State relief because of legal residence requirements.⁸⁴ Organized growers and their sympathizers strongly opposed this policy. They threatened that a legislative relief committee would conduct a "thorough investigation" of charges that several hundred strikers had been certified for relief since the strike began.⁸⁵

A grower in Saticoy was the first to accede to union demands by signing a temporary contract to pay pickers 15 cents per box, a substantial increase in rates over the prevailing scale.⁸⁶ The growers' ranks were far from broken, however. Union finances were strained through maintaining soup kitchens and living quarters for several hundred evicted strikers. Numerous pickets were arrested on charges of disturbing the peace by "heckling" nonunion pickers employed in harvesting lemons.⁸⁷

The strike dragged on for several months, not ending until May. Rumors of a "sell-out" were current. "Pedro Pete" Peterson was accused of settling with the growers for a compromise agreement which covered only the small fraction of workers who had been organized beforehand by the A.F. of L., leaving the unorganized majority stranded. Some union leaders and Mexican workers claimed that the strike was broken by an influx of "Okies and Arkies" who had read of the strike in eastern papers.

⁸²Los Angeles Examiner, March 8, 1941.

⁸³Los Angeles Times, February 22, 1941.

The State Labor Commissioner later conducted hearings on union charges that officials of the Seaboard Lemon Association violated the labor code by misrepresenting conditions in Ventura County to laborers of other areas. He also reviewed testimony to the effect that Ventura College had violated the code by asking students to apply for lemon-picking jobs. (Ventura Star Free Press, Feb. 21, 1941.)

⁸⁴Los Angeles Examiner, March 8, 1941.

⁸⁵The Relief Supervisor pointed out that there were some 1,200 applications for relief, of which 533 cases were pending, while rejections were running about 60 percent. (Los Angeles Examiner, Mar. 15, 1941.) In subsequent testimony at the hearings it was brought out that strikers were granted relief after the local State Employment Service office had certified that there was no work available because of strike conditions in the Ventura County lemon groves. (Los Angeles Times, Mar. 18, 1941.)

⁸⁶Los Angeles Times, March 7, 1941.

⁸⁷Idem, March 10, 1941.

The temper of industrial urban and agrarian interests in California was unmistakably hostile to the new A.F. of L. organizing drive. It was one of the few disputes in which "Communist agitation" was not the main issue. Anti-unionism had broadened; employers in agriculture like their prototypes in other industries, tended to identify their particular interests with those of the Nation. The Los Angeles Times of February 17, 1941, expressed this view strongly in a long editorial:

California is at this moment face to face with a harvest labor situation that is truly alarming. Both C.I.O. and A.F. of L. trouble makers are bearing down with strikes, secondary boycotts, picketing, and "hot cargo" pressure on growers trying to provide food and vital raw materials needed as never before. The condition exists in almost every major producing area in the State and in practically every instance is resulting in bottlenecks in harvesting, packing, processing, and transportation.

Most of the trouble arises from union squabbings over so-called "collective-bargaining rights" which actually means merely the inside track on membership and dues collections; few of the controversies involve disputes over wages and working conditions.

People are primarily concerned these days about the efficacy of defense activities and the Associated Farmers can count on ample support if they decide, as they have intimated they may, to seek new legislation for the protection of agriculture's endeavors to that end.

CHAPTER XII.—Unionism in Arizona

Seasonal Labor and Large-Scale Farms

Arizona probably has diverged from the family-farm ideal more sharply than any other important agricultural State. The land available for cultivation is limited primarily to areas accessible to the water supplies necessary for irrigation. Ownership and control of such lands is even more concentrated in Arizona than in California. Units of 500 acres and over composed 2.4 percent of all irrigated farms and 20 percent of the acreage of such farms, while farms of 100 to 499 acres accounted for 25 percent of all irrigated farms and 49 percent of their acreage in 1935.¹ Statistics on the employment of farm labor illustrate this concentration. Large agricultural enterprises hiring laborers as groups, rather than as individual farm hands, are relatively most prevalent in Arizona; no other State in the country has reported so high a proportion of such farms. The proportion of farms which hired 10 or more laborers each in 1935 was 0.2 percent for the United States as a whole; 1.3 percent for California, and 2.4 percent for Arizona.² In the country at large, approximately a sixth of all hired farm laborers were employed on farms having 8 or more workers; in California, 42 percent of all farm laborers were employed on such farms, and in Arizona, 68 percent.³

Large farms hiring laborers in groups have tended to displace family farms. Irrigated land was used increasingly for the production of a few intensively grown commercial crops for sale in distant markets. Cotton has long been most important among these products. From 1929 to 1931, for instance, it contributed approximately 40 percent of the total crop income for Arizona, and in the late thirties it assumed increasing importance.⁴ Citrus fruits, lettuce, and melons have come next in amount of irrigated land and the number of laborers employed.

Arizona farming became more dependent upon hired laborers, as contrasted with family workers, as the acreage in cotton, citrus fruit, lettuce, and truck crops continued to expand during the twenties and thirties.⁵ By 1935 hired labor comprised 63 percent of all labor on farms in the counties containing Arizona's principal irrigated areas.⁶

The heavy capital investments required for adequate use of irrigation facilities and farm machinery in producing special cash crops favored the large farm unit as against the small. In the opinion of Dr. E. D. Tetreau, Professor of Rural Sociology at the University of Arizona—

¹E. D. Tetreau: *Social Organization in Arizona's Irrigated Farms*, in *Rural Sociology*, Vol. V, No. 2, 1940 (p. 200).

²*Idem* (p. 203).

³Witt Bowden: *Three Decades of Farm Labor*. U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Serial No. R-796 (pp. 8-9), 1937.

⁴*Present-Day Agriculture in Arizona*, Bulletin No. 141, Agricultural Experiment Station, College of Agriculture, University of Arizona, Tucson, 1932 (p. 10).

⁵E. D. Tetreau: *Hired Labor Requirements on Arizona Irrigated Farms*. Bulletin No. 160, Synopsis, Agricultural Experiment Station, College of Agriculture, University of Arizona, Tucson, May 1938.

⁶*Idem* (p. 200).

Markets and machines definitely threaten the family-size farm in Arizona's irrigated areas. Commercialized and mechanized farming experts and operators exploit land and water resources, using cheap money and cheap labor to the exhaustion of soil fertility and often to the detriment of local institutions.⁸

Seasonality of employment for hired farm laborers became relatively more extreme in Arizona than in any other State. As irrigated areas specialized increasingly in a few crops requiring large numbers of laborers, the period of harvesting became shorter. A smaller proportion of regular farm labor was used. The demand for seasonal labor grew in terms of numbers but was concentrated in shorter periods throughout the year. Man-days of labor required during the peak of the season in November, as compared with the nadir in March, was roughly 6 to 1 by the late thirties. For all irrigated areas in Arizona, more than two-thirds of the labor-hours throughout the year were performed by seasonal day labor, the remaining third being done by farm hands paid by the month or the year.⁸ The irrigated areas varied widely in their requirements of seasonal labor. The Salt River Valley, largest and most diversified in crops, was most regular in its labor demands; the Casa Grande Valley, specializing in cotton, was most seasonal. Of each 1,000 man-days of hired labor, 356 were those of regular labor and 644 were those of seasonal labor in the Salt River Valley; in the Casa Grande Valley the corresponding numbers were 147 and 853. The Upper Gila, Yuma-Gila and Santa Cruz Valleys came between these extremes.⁸

Arizona's large farms have been in a strategic geographical position. The State lies between California and the Dust Bowl regions of the Southwest, and the more important highways traverse the irrigated farming regions. Hence, large farms specializing in intensively grown cash crops have been able to utilize the continuous stream of displaced farm families migrating to California. A substantial minority of its seasonal workers migrate regularly to Arizona from Texas, New Mexico, and particularly California, following the harvests.

Because of the continuous migration and communication between Arizona and California, agricultural workers in the former State have been influenced by labor movements in the latter. Many have worked for large-scale employers with branch plants and landholdings in both States. Therefore, collective bargaining, to be effective, has had to be interstate in scope. The more important instances of collective action among Arizona farm laborers were a sort of "backwash" from California. During the late thirties the more prominent agricultural labor unions in Arizona were usually under the jurisdiction of parent organizations in California.

The structure of Arizona's agriculture, dominated as it was by large-scale farms whose demand for labor was highly seasonal, tended to generate labor-employer conflict. A continual labor surplus and severe job competition from transient laborers from Mexico and the Southwest at the same time weakened farm laborers' bargaining power. For the majority, the duration of employment and length of residence in Arizona was short. Hence they were considerably more difficult to unionize than migratory workers in California.

⁸E. D. Tetreau: *Hired Labor Requirements on Arizona Irrigated Farms*. Bulletin No. 160, Synopsis, Agricultural Experiment Station, College of Agriculture, University of Arizona, Tucson. May 1938.

Beginnings of Farm-Labor Unionism

Sporadic collective action among Arizona's agricultural workers began during the First World War years. At that time white American farm laborers, who were usually the more skilled or supervisory ranch hands, had a tradition of individual action and loyalty to the owner or "old man." Mexican laborers in both mining and agriculture, however, were influenced by the activities of the Industrial Workers of the World and other unions.⁹ Several strikes occurred during the war years among Mexican miners in Arizona who had belonged to unions affiliated to the Western Federation of Miners, the I.W.W., and the American Federation of Labor. Many agricultural laborers had also worked in mines at various times and thus had had some experience with labor unionism.

Federal Labor Unions of Cotton Pickers

The Arizona State Federation of Labor became interested in agricultural workers in the early 1920's. During the postwar slump which closed down many mines in northern Mexico and Arizona, large numbers of unemployed miners were recruited to pick cotton. Lester Doane, State representative of the A.F. of L., together with C. N. Idar, A.F. of L. ace Mexican organizer, conducted a temporarily successful unionizing campaign among these workers. During 1921 these two organized 14 federal labor unions of cotton pickers, averaging 300 to 400 members each, in the largest towns of Maricopa County.¹⁰

The success of the campaign was due partly to the fact that Doane had been a foreman in a copper mine in Callandria, Mexico, just across the border from Bisbee, Ariz. When the mine was closed during the postwar depression, many unemployed Mexicans were recruited for cotton picking. During his organizing campaign, according to his statements, he met men in almost every camp who had worked under him in Callandria. On several occasions these men protected the organizers from threatened violence and arrest at the hands of growers and local authorities.¹¹

Doane called a wage conference at the beginning of the cotton-picking season, after a network of locals had been established. Representatives of organized growers and pickers, together with the county sheriff and an official of the Mexican Government, met to discuss wage rates and working conditions. The Mexican official supported the organized pickers by threatening to have them repatriated and to close the border to further immigration to Arizona, unless conditions were improved. According to Doane, he even threatened to have the growers' labor-recruiting agents arrested in Mexico. Through such organized pressure the pickers were able to win a substantial increase in rates—from the prevailing 2½ cents per pound up to 4 cents.¹¹

The federal labor unions lasted only one season, however. Large numbers of cotton pickers returned to Mexico, and most of the others in time migrated to other areas or were absorbed into other industries.

⁹Arizona, A State Guide, (WPA American Guide Series, New York, 1940) p. 97.

¹⁰Coldwater, Buckeye, Glendale, Cashion, Avondale, Tolleson, Alhambra, Peoria, Scottsdale, Tempe, Mesa, Gilbert, Chandler, and Higley.

¹¹Field notes.

Strike of Puerto Ricans

The first highly publicized strike among cotton pickers in Arizona occurred during the late twenties as a result of labor-recruiting activities by organized growers. As greater limitations on the immigration of Mexicans were being imposed by the U. S. Department of Labor, the growers searched for alternative labor supplies. In 1926 several hundred Puerto Ricans, who were not subject to the immigration restrictions applied to Mexicans, were brought into Arizona. Labor troubles soon developed. A spontaneous strike broke out, and the Arizona State Federation of Labor, among other sympathizers, supported the movement. Many Puerto Rican strikers were brought to Phoenix, where they were fed and lodged, first in the Labor Temple and later in exhibition buildings at the State Fair Grounds. In time they returned to work on the cotton ranches and were later absorbed into other employments.¹²

An attempt was made at the same time by the A.F. of L. to organize the migratory fruit and vegetable packing-shed workers but, as in California during this period, a few short-lived local unions were the only result. The "fruit tramps" relied rather upon informal "job action" tactics to enforce their immediate collective demands.¹³

Trade Union Unity League in the Thirties

The effects of the campaign of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union in California agriculture were felt in Arizona during the depression years of the early 1930's. The Trade Union Unity League became active in 1933, organizing unemployed in the cities and seasonal workers in the rural areas during the harvest season. In Arizona these two classes of workers were largely interchangeable. The agitation by Communist organizers culminated in two large strikes, involving several thousand cotton pickers.

The tactics were similar to those employed in California, though the opposition from growers and law-enforcement officers was not so violent. A few organizers of the C.&A.W.I.U. maintained State headquarters in Phoenix. They regularly visited the camps of migratory workers in several counties, to address mass meetings and establish local unions. Strike and negotiating committees were elected in each community, to organize and bargain collectively with local employers. These groups in turn met regularly with the State executive of the C.&A.W.I.U. in Phoenix, to coordinate union activities over a wide area. Outside support was furnished through the Workers International Relief and the International Labor Defense.

The first strike involved approximately 2,500 cotton pickers in Yuma County for several days during September 1933 and succeeded in winning a general wage increase.¹⁴ The union claimed that agreements covering wages and working conditions were signed with individual growers. The extreme transiency of the pickers, however, made unions

¹²M. C. Brown and O. Cassmore: *Migratory Cotton Pickers in Arizona*. Washington, Works Progress Administration, 1939 (p. 67).

¹³*Ibidem* (p. 100).

¹⁴Josiah Folsom: *Labor Disputes in Agriculture, 1927-38* (unpublished).

impossible to maintain, and the C.&A.W.I.U. locals did not last beyond the 1933 harvest season.

T.U.U.L. organizers established a local union of cotton pickers in Coolidge (Pinal County) during the winter picking season of 1933. Its chief purpose was to combat the current policy of discharging relief clients in order to have them available for farm work at low wages. In the spring of 1934, when it was apparent that the C.&A.W.I.U. was rapidly losing ground on the Pacific Coast, the local asked for and received a charter from the A.F. of L. as Federal Labor Union No. 19542.

Coolidge was the only agricultural-labor center organized at the time. It furnished the focal point for directing a second strike of cotton pickers, which spread throughout the Salt River Valley of Maricopa County during September 1934. The most active organizers behind this movement were the T.U.U.L. members within the local union. They employed tactics roughly similar to those of the previous strike. Camp meetings were held in unorganized centers such as Chandler, Mesa, and Buckeye, strike and negotiation committees were elected, and "guerilla pickets" were used to spread the strike to fields in which picking operations continued. Little violence was reported, compared with the cotton strike in California during 1933, though Clay Naff, former Communist organizer in Arizona, stated later that on one occasion he narrowly escaped being lynched by irate growers.¹⁵ Ultimately, the strike included several thousand pickers in Maricopa County.

This strike resulted in State intervention and arbitration, for the first time in Arizona agriculture. Under orders from Governor Moeur, one representative from the growers and one from the pickers (chosen from the federal labor union in Coolidge) met with a member from the Labor Department of the State Industrial Commission to decide the terms of settlement.¹⁶ The final decision of the arbitration board awarded an increase of 15 cents per hundredweight to the pickers, raising the scale from 60 to 75 cents.

Several local unions were established during the following year in such centers as Casa Grande, Chandler, and Phoenix. Following the collapse of the C.&A.W.I.U. on the Pacific Coast in 1934 and the dissolution of the Trade Union Unity League in 1935, left-wing organizers transferred their affiliations to the A.F. of L. Meanwhile Lester Doane, State organizer and president of the Arizona State Federation of Labor, again became active in unionizing miners, construction workers, and agricultural laborers. During the period 1934-36, 18 federal labor unions of agricultural and industrial workers were chartered in various communities, but none of them attempted direct collective bargaining in agriculture.

Unionism Among Shed Workers

Trade-unionism among the fruit and vegetable packing-shed workers of Arizona began in 1933. The rapid growth of the Vegetable Packers Association of Salinas, Calif. (later chartered as the Fruit and

¹⁵Los Angeles Examiner, April 22 and 23, 1936. Articles by Clay Naff, former organizer of the Trade Union Unity League.

¹⁶Phoenix Gazette, September 14, 1934 (p. 4).

Vegetable Workers Union Local No. 18211) was reflected in southern California and Arizona. Many of the same "fruit tramps" (as the packing-shed workers were called) worked in both regions during certain months each year in the course of their seasonal migrations. Considerable unrest resulted from the low wage levels in the industry; the prevailing minimum rate had fallen from 70 cents per hour in 1929 to 25 cents per hour in 1933.

An organizing campaign backed by the Phoenix Central Labor Council and the Arizona State Federation of Labor began during the fall and winter of 1933. For the first time in many Arizona plants, packing-shed workers carried on collective bargaining with grower-shippers. A number of scattered strikes broke out in Phoenix and Yuma during the season, before the workers had been sufficiently well-organized to plan beforehand an adequate program of collective action. Even so, in most of these the strikers won their demands. In one instance a delegation persuaded Governor Moeur to bring pressure upon a shipping company, to reinstate several discharged strikers. Under the threat of revocation of its license to operate, the company complied with the demand.

In December 1933, the A.F. of L. chartered the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union Local 19115 of Phoenix. For the first 2 years it had difficulty functioning effectively, because its purely local jurisdiction was unsuitable for workers who migrated to several States each year. It attempted to overcome this drawback by establishing a sublocal in Yuma, the other main center for packing and shipping fruits and vegetables in Arizona.

A jurisdictional dispute developed between the California and Arizona unions when the president of Salinas Local No. 18211 claimed control over dues paid by those of its members who worked seasonally in Yuma. This was settled when the west coast representative of the A.F. of L. met with officials of the Arizona and California State Federations and with representatives of the two shed workers' unions. It was ruled that each was to have State-wide jurisdiction in the fruit and vegetable packing industry.

Union officials estimated that some 3,000 fruit and vegetable packing-house workers possessed membership cards in Local No. 19115 by April 1936.¹⁷ The sub-local in Yuma, however, subsequently became better organized and more closely knit than the parent body in Phoenix. During 1935 and 1936 the former obtained signed agreements with shipping companies (which the Phoenix local never was able to do), establishing standard union wages and working conditions, closed shop, and union label on all products packed and shipped.¹⁸ In Phoenix the shed workers, although in closer contact with established urban A.F. of L. unions, were more widely scattered in their living quarters and places of employment. In the opinion of union organizers, they were too accessible to influences opposed to unionism. The Phoenix local maintained union standards by verbal agreement, backed by the rank and file's readiness to apply "job action." In April 1936, for instance, a sit-down strike in the Hawes shed in Chandler forced the management to rehire a discharged union employee and pay him the established union wage.¹⁹ In January 1937, a half-day sit-down strike in the P. J.

¹⁷Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 10, May 1936 (p. 1).

¹⁸Idem, Vol. I, No. 13, August 1936 (p. 1).

¹⁹Idem, Vol. I, No. 10, May 1936 (p. 1).

Linde shed near Phoenix forced the company to rehire a discharged union packer and to fire six former nonunion strikebreakers.²⁰

Early in 1937 the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union began negotiations with the Farmers Union of Arizona, which had been organized late in 1936. This latter organization directed its main appeals to small farmers who felt that they suffered disadvantages in bargaining with the larger grower-shipper interests. A program of united action was planned for the common interests of workers and small farmers. The possibility of using both a labor union and farmers' union label on produce grown and packed by members of these organizations was discussed by the Central Labor Council of Phoenix, but little or nothing came of it.²¹

State-Wide Unionism and the U.C.A.P.A.W.A.

There was little direct cooperation between organized packing-shed workers and field laborers during the first few years of unionism. Their organizations developed independently of each other. The shed workers resisted any attempts, whether in unions or elsewhere, to classify them as agricultural workers. These skilled and semiskilled laborers feared that they would be subjected to the discrimination, low social status, and lack of legal protection suffered by field workers. Furthermore, the two groups were divided by racial as well as occupational differences. White shed workers, while sympathetic to the unionizing of field laborers, generally refused to work beside members of a nonwhite race or even to allow them to work inside a packing shed. This attitude had developed, as shed workers were quick to explain, from the tendency of nonwhite workers (as members of a minority) to stick together and help one another obtain jobs. To allow one or a few to work in a shed, the whites felt, would be a "thin edge of the wedge." The nonwhites in time would become available to the employer in such numbers that the whites would be displaced, wage rates would be depressed, and any organization of whites for their own protection would be rendered ineffective.

Several incidents in California had exposed the bargaining weaknesses of unionism and strike action carried on exclusively by white shed workers against highly integrated grower-shipper enterprises. The Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union, consequently, began to cooperate with other affiliates of the State Federation of Labor in promoting the organization of field workers in federal labor unions. Organized shed workers in Yuma held open meetings for field laborers in the lettuce and cantaloup crops, to "educate" them as a preliminary step to unionizing them later. An Arizona Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee was established in March 1937, by the F.V.W.U. of Yuma and Phoenix.²¹

The National Committee to Aid Agricultural Workers sought with some success to bring about a closer cooperation between fruit and vegetable shed workers' unions. By late 1936 these groups were beginning to favor the organization of a separate international union for all workers in agriculture and related industries. The fruit and vegetable packers' unions of Arizona and California accordingly sent delegates to the

²⁰Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 5, May 1937 (p. 4).

²¹Idem, Vol. II, No. 4, April 1937 (p. 1).

national convention in Denver during July 1937, when the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was formed. The Yuma packing-shed local voted to affiliate with the new C.I.O. International, and the Phoenix local soon followed.

An international representative of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was appointed late in 1937 to expand and coordinate the activities of local organizations among field and shed workers of Arizona. During the winter of 1937 a new union of field workers was organized in Yuma and chartered as U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Local No. 130. In March 1938, in protest against a 15-percent wage cut at the H. P. Garin Co., it conducted a strike of cutters, loaders, and teamsters, as well as field laborers. The union demanded recognition, reinstatement with back pay for discharged members, wages of 35 cents per hour for field packers, 40 cents for cutters, and 50 cents for loaders, as well as double pay for holiday work.²² In the course of the walk-out, according to union spokesmen, Indian and Filipino workers brought in as "scabs" joined the picket lines.²³ On the fifth day of the strike, a union newspaper reported, "hired thugs and vigilantes under the leadership of a former judge launched a mass assault on the picket line."²³ The strike was finally broken and wage rates remained the same as before.

Another local was chartered by the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in Nogales, on the Mexican border. Previously the independent Santa Cruz Industrial Union had been formed and later chartered as a federal labor union of the A.F. of L. This organization was composed mainly of nonagricultural labor in general construction work, but an attempt was made to enlist small cattle ranchers of the vicinity. It was too far removed from the center of union activity in the Phoenix area, however, to be a permanent or effective local.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s most successful venture in Arizona was its leadership of the much-publicized Commodity March in the spring of 1938. During the cotton-picking season of late 1937-38 the Farm Labor Service (recruiting agency for the cotton growers) had overextended its activities. It had enticed cotton pickers to the State in such large numbers that the resulting decrease in employment and earnings left destitute several thousand families in the Salt River Valley at the end of the season. They were without the means either to move on to other jobs or to return to their home States.²⁴

The international representative of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. organized parades and demonstrations of cotton pickers and established workers' committees to confer with the Governor.²⁵ Newspapers gave wide publicity to the county health officer's reports of sickness and starvation.²⁶ Pressure was brought to bear on the State and Federal Governments to provide adequate emergency relief.

The agitation finally brought improvement in conditions for cotton pickers, as well as greater prestige for the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. The Farm Security Administration immediately made available, for relief, \$50,000 from its regional office and the State Department of Health dispatched

²²CIO News, March 12, 1938.

²³People's World (San Francisco), December 30, 1938.

²⁴M. C. Brown and O. Cassmore: *Migratory Cotton Pickers in Arizona*. Washington, WPA Social Research Division, 1913.

²⁵Phoenix Gazette, March 21, 1938 (p. 1); CIO News, March 19, 1938 (p. 2).

²⁶Phoenix Gazette, March 23, 1938: *Disease and Poverty Rampant in Cotton Camps*.

nurses and case workers to various cotton camps in the Valley. Housing for the laborers was improved through the establishment of FSA migratory housing units.²⁷ Restrictions were imposed on activities of the growers' Farm Labor Service, and a more adequate and rational plan for labor recruiting was developed through cooperation of State and Federal relief and employment agencies.

The chief gain to the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was its recognition by various State and Federal Government officials as the spokesman for employed and unemployed cotton pickers.²⁸ After this success the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. made rapid increases in membership among hitherto unorganized field laborers, and among Negro workers in cotton compresses and cotton-oil mills near Phoenix.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was active also in a strike of approximately 250 strawberry pickers, chiefly Mexicans and native whites, near Phoenix during April 1938,²⁹ a number of whom had been involved in the Commodity March the previous month. The April walk-out, spontaneous and loosely organized, was in protest against a decrease in wage rates by 5 cents a crate from the previous season's scale of 25 cents.²⁹ Before the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. organizers assumed control, internal dissension, reported to be racial in origin, had begun to split the ranks of the strikers. The strike soon ended when it met with violence and intimidation from civil authorities, supported by the Associated Farmers of Arizona.³⁰

The effects of these spontaneous movements during early 1938, supplemented by money and organizing personnel provided by the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. national executive, brought a rapid increase in union membership in Arizona. The international representative organized Local No. 191 as one large comprehensive union, centered in Phoenix. It was composed of four main classes of workers: Field laborers, shed workers, cotton-oil mill, and cotton-compress employees. Packing-shed workers, previously organized in A.F. of L. Local No. 19115, were transferred to the new organization, to which they now paid their dues.

The organization proved to be too unwieldy to function effectively. Its executive board was composed of working delegates from sublocals in various sections of the Salt River Valley, and it was difficult for them to convene for board meetings. A second difficulty arose from the fact that delegates from sublocals in varied occupations each had distinct policies to propose; this made it hard for them to meet on common ground. There was strong sentiment among the packers, for instance, to remain organized in a separate union which would be affiliated to, but not absorbed in, a central executive body.

Following much friction and frequent changes in international representatives for the State, the Phoenix union was finally reorganized. Packing-shed workers were chartered separately as Local No. 78, with headquarters in Phoenix; organized cotton-oil mill and cotton-compress workers were chartered as Local No. 306 of Phoenix; and five separate field workers' locals, varying in size from 50 to 300 members, were established in Phoenix, Chandler, Mesa, Glendale, and Buckeye. Central union headquarters were later transferred to Los Angeles, under the direct jurisdiction of the District No. 2 U.C.A.P.A.W.A. executive.

²⁷Phoenix Gazette, September 17, 1938 (p. 1).

²⁸CIO News, Vol. I, No. 17, March 24, 1938 (p. 2).

²⁹Phoenix Gazette, April 9, 1938 (p. 1).

³⁰Field notes.

The processing workers made some notable gains during 1938 and 1939. Negro members of the Cotton Oil Mill and Compress Workers Union won a suit filed with the National Labor Relations Board against the Anderson Clayton Co. The company was forced to reinstate with back pay 16 members discharged for union activity. In the fall of 1938 and again in the spring of 1939 the local obtained signed collective agreements with the company, bringing substantial increases in basic wage scales, union recognition, and overtime rates. However, a strike of a months' duration in October 1939, resulted in only compromise gains, and though a new agreement was signed, the position of the union became precarious.

Shed workers in late 1938 succeeded, with a vote of 760 to 252 in a NLRB election, in establishing the jurisdiction of Local No. 78 over 26 sheds in the Salt River Valley area near Phoenix. The shippers joined with the Western Growers Protective Association in an unsuccessful appeal against the Labor Board's decision, on the grounds that shed workers should be classed as agricultural and therefore beyond the jurisdiction of the NLRB.³¹ The union won signed collective agreements granting union wages and working conditions in the major packing sheds of Yuma.

Field workers' locals chartered near Phoenix meanwhile tried early in 1939 to win improvements for their members in the lettuce harvest. Representatives of the locals met regularly in a Field Workers Council in Phoenix. This body was designed to coordinate the activities and standardize the demands of the unions. Farm employers and county officials as well as union members and sympathizers were invited to open hearings held by the union organizers to air the grievances of workers. Workers' committees were formed to negotiate with representatives of the growers and shippers.

The unions demanded recognition, free transportation to and from the fields, a minimum wage of 45 cents per hour and guaranty of 4 hours' work when called to the fields, time and a half for overtime after 8 hours and for Sundays and holidays, employment without discrimination against unionists, and wages in cash or by check.³²

The unions were not sufficiently well organized to enforce their demands. The Associated Farmers of Arizona mobilized its forces to support local authorities against the menace of a field workers' strike, and open threats of violence forestalled any attempts by the workers. Sheriff Lon Jordon of Maricopa County was reported to have said that he was "watching the situation closely, and * * * prepared at a moment's notice to dispatch a large force of men to any sector of the Valley to quell any uprising and throw the ringleaders in jail."³³

This was the last activity of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in Arizona. The State organization was abandoned and the local unions disappeared when the international was forced, because of financial stringency, to restrict its organizing activities and reduce its personnel. Only the local Negro Cotton Oil Mill and Compress Workers Union remained.

³¹CIO News, January 2, 1939 (p. 1).

³²See Appendix I (p. 432).

³³Phoenix Gazette, March 30, 1939 (p. 6).

N. H. Powers, who headed a negotiation committee, said that a prominent contractor told him: "We just want you to call a strike—we are ready—you all will be shot down like dogs." (People's World, San Francisco, Apr. 3, 1939, p. 2.)

CHAPTER XIII.—Unionism in the Pacific Northwest

Migratory Labor and Seasonal Agriculture

The structure of farm operations in the Northwest has not been favorable to the organization of rural labor. No stable or effective union movement developed among farm workers in this region during the thirties, despite support from powerful urban labor organizations. Farming in most of the Pacific Northwest has remained small, and the majority of farm operators belong in the category of "working" or "family" farmers. Farm laborers have been mainly "hired men," scattered in location and employed individually. Collective bargaining and strikes have rarely occurred among this group.

Certain limited areas stand out in contrast to this usual pattern, and it was in these that sporadic labor trouble broke out from time to time. Large and small farms growing intensive cash crops and employing large gangs of seasonal workers developed in scattered "pockets"—sections of valley country along the Hood and Willamette Rivers in Oregon, the White River in western Washington, the Yakima and Wenatchee Rivers in central Washington, and the Snake River in Idaho. Before the First World War, moreover, large-scale wheat farms in eastern Washington and Oregon hired crews of seasonal harvest hands who migrated regularly from the Middle West.

Industrialized farming in these areas gave rise to unrest and a propensity to collective action among seasonal workers. Their bargaining position was consistently weak, however, and this precluded their organizing effective unions. Each valley area specialized in one or a few crops requiring large numbers of workers—berries and truck vegetables in the White River Valley, hops in Willamette, apples in Wenatchee, hops and apples in Hood and Yakima, and peas in the Snake River Valley. Seasonality of work was extreme in such areas, and the labor recruited temporarily for harvesting was exceedingly heterogeneous. During the depression years of the 1930's, competition for jobs became even more severe than in California, and the labor market was correspondingly disorganized. California's migratory workers, some of whom had regularly followed the crop harvests northward into Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, came in increasing numbers during the thirties. To these were added a growing number of urban unemployed from such cities as Seattle and Portland, and an increasing stream of displaced farm families migrating from the Middle West and Southwest in search of employment. Wages and working conditions on farms employing labor declined to substandard levels. Friction along racial and sectional lines developed among seasonal workers early in the thirties. Toward the middle of the decade the militant unionism of California's agricultural workers spread in milder form to scattered areas of the Northwest, giving rise to many sporadic protest strikes.

Organized efforts of farmer-employers to combat labor trouble were like the attempts in California, though usually more spontaneous and local. In the late thirties branches of the Associated Farmers were established in Oregon and Washington, which later were affiliated into a west coast anti-union organization in agriculture.

Farm-Labor Strikes in Oregon

The industrial and commercial structure of Oregon's economy has never fostered a labor movement of comparable importance to that in California and Washington, nor has its agricultural system; farms were usually smaller, less specialized and seasonal in crops, and less dependent upon nonresident labor.

The long-established hop industry in the Hood and Willamette River Valleys and the recently developed pea-growing areas in the eastern section of the State were notable exceptions, resembling the pattern in California. Highly specialized farming enterprises were operated on a large scale, often by absentee owners, many of whom were outside corporations; and large numbers of local seasonal workers were employed, as well as migrants from California.

Oregon, because of its proximity to California and Washington, felt the influence of their labor unrest. At least two farm-labor strikes in the years before the First World War, both in the vicinity of North Yamhill, were reported to have been led by the Industrial Workers of the World. A walk-out in 1910 protested the discriminatory discharge of union members. Another in 1912 was led by "wobblies" who demanded wages of 30 cents per hour and "decent quarters."¹ Small sporadic outbreaks occurred infrequently in fruit and vegetable packing sheds.² The anti-Filipino riots which developed along the Pacific Coast during 1929 and 1930 occurred in milder form in local communities in Oregon. They were generated in large part by unemployment and greater competition for jobs during the first years of depression. In the White River Valley of Columbia County, Oreg., several hundred native white workers went on strike in order to force vegetable farmers to cease employing Filipinos.³ In the Scapoose Delta lands of Columbia County, near the town of Yankton, labor organizations backed by the local Grange strongly opposed the importation of Filipinos. The California Conserving Co., with the support of local business interests, had planned to hire Filipino laborers to harvest cucumber crops grown for a local pickle factory.⁴

The only large strikes in Oregon's agriculture occurred during 1933 and 1934 in the hop industry of Polk, Benton, and Marion Counties. Seasonal laborers employed in this crop undoubtedly were influenced by the current wave of farm strikes led by the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union in California. It is not unlikely that many of them had taken part in strikes in California earlier in the season. The union may even have sent organizers from California to follow itinerant agricultural laborers in their seasonal migration north to the Oregon hop fields. At any rate a small number could rapidly promote a strike to protest the depressed labor conditions then prevalent in the hop-growing area. No union of hop pickers developed among the

¹Paul Brissenden: *The I.W.W.—A Study of American Syndicalism*, Vol. 83, Columbia University Studies in History and Economics, New York, 1919 (p. 306).

²The Medford Mail Tribune, of September 10, 1936, for instance, reported a "slight misunderstanding" in a local packing plant when the management allegedly fired, for union activity, six members of the Salinas Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union Local 18211. The difficulty was soon resolved in a conference between the operator, his attorney, a conciliator of the U. S. Department of Labor, and a member of the Northwest Regional Labor Board.

³Sidney Sufrin: *Labor Organization in Agricultural America in American Journal of Sociology*, January 1938).

⁴St. Helen's Mist, June 6, 13, and 20, 1930.

strikers, however, as their period of employment in the crop was too brief. The strikes were characteristically sudden and brief.

One of the chief causes of labor unrest in the hop yards during 1933 was the low wage rate of \$1 per hundredweight. It had been adopted as a standard agreement among growers at a preharvest meeting held at Salem. Subsequently they failed to adhere to the standard rate, and some growers offered a bonus as high as 20 cents per hundredweight in order to have their hops picked more rapidly. This aggravated the dissatisfaction with the standard rate.⁵ Labor unrest finally flared into overt action, according to the Sheriff of Polk County, when the growers demanded exceedingly "clean" picking.⁵ They were able to impose such requirements in 1933 because widespread unemployment and a surplus labor supply had increased their bargaining power.

A series of small disturbances broke out first in Marion County during early September 1933. Four alleged agitators were arrested and released on bail. On September 13, 1,000 to 1,200 pickers made a spontaneous walk-out at the McLaughlin yard near Independence (Polk County). This was one of the largest hop farms in the area, comprising several hundred acres. The major demand of the strikers was a 100-percent increase in wage rates, to 2 cents per pound in place of the prevailing 1 cent.⁶ Additional demands were formulated later at a mass meeting, including improved sanitary conditions, reemployment of strikers without discrimination, and recognition of a newly elected strike committee.⁷ The strike was reported as carried out in an "orderly fashion." During the first day there was no picketing, and no arrests were made.⁸

Hop-yard operators blamed the strike on "Communist agitators" who had been active in Marion County the week before; they announced that they "would not yield in any degree to the demands of the strikers."⁸ This attitude changed abruptly, however, and the strikers' position was strengthened, when rains kept pickers from the yards and allowed additional time for organization. Within 2 days the owner of the McLaughlin yard announced a compromise wage increase to \$1.50 per hundredweight, which was accepted unanimously by the pickers.⁹

Strikes in other large hop yards of Marion and Polk Counties followed this victory. Growers at first agreed among themselves to oust all strikers who refused to pick at the \$1 per hundredweight scale. When this plan failed, they held another meeting to try to reach a standard agreement on \$1.20 per hundredweight.⁹ This effort likewise failed. Several large growers were faced with walk-outs of hundreds of their pickers, while operations had to be suspended because of recurrent rains. They soon followed the McLaughlin yard's lead in reaching a settlement at the \$1.50 rate. By September 17 the strikes, many of them lasting only a few hours, had been settled. A general raise in wages approaching the \$1.50 scale was granted throughout the hop-growing area in order to forestall further labor trouble.¹⁰

Efforts to suppress the strikes by legal action failed in most cases. The Oregon Statesman in its issue of September 16, 1933, reported the following instance:

⁵Oregon Statesman (Salem), September 15, 1933.

⁶St. Helen's Mist, September 14, 1933.

⁷Oregon Statesman (Salem), September 15, 1933.

⁸Idem, September 14, 1933.

⁹Idem, September 15, 1933.

¹⁰Idem, September 16 and 17, 1933.

In the Tankella yard near Independence, controlled by T. A. Livesay & Co., more than 300 pickers walked out on September 15 in demanding \$1.50 for the remainder of the season. Allen Tankella, manager of the yard and a deputy sheriff in Polk County, immediately took A. G. Sewell, who had suggested the \$1.50 price, into custody in Independence on the grounds that he had "talked too much." Officials at Independence, however, refused to hold him, claiming there was no charge against him.

Tankella drove back to the yard and after a conference, told the strikers they could go back to work at \$1.50 per hundredweight. Strikers refused until Sewell was reinstated. Tankella gave in and permitted Sewell to work.

Labor conflict again developed in hop-growing sections of Polk and Marion Counties during the 1934 season. Growers by mutual agreement had established a standard wage rate of \$1.20 per hundredweight before harvesting began, but many were reported to have granted bonuses in order to avert strikes.¹¹ In anticipation of conflict the county sheriff obtained a supply of tear gas and "John Doe warrants."¹² A strike began on a small ranch near Independence on September 5, when 15 out of a crew of 50 pickers ceased work in order to enforce a demand for the previous year's rate of \$1.50.¹³ The following day more than 2,000 workers walked out of the largest ranch in Polk County, belonging to the Horst interests of California. Several hundred more pickers struck in other large yards of the area.¹³

Growers again placed responsibility for the strikes on "an influx of outside agitators following the Pacific coast fruit and agricultural harvests." No violence occurred, and no arrests were made. The general strike lasted for only a day, ending when the larger growers agreed to meet the strikers' demands for \$1.50 per hundredweight.¹³

The final strike of the season took place 4 days later and involved 500 out of 750 pickers on one large ranch. The employer had continued to pay the \$1.20 scale after neighboring yards had raised their rates to \$1.50. The strikers returned to work next day without winning their demands.¹⁴

No further strikes were reported in Oregon hop fields until 1936, when another series of small ones occurred. Prices paid for picking by this time had risen generally to a scale of \$1.50 per hundredweight. A few yards paid \$1.75 and some even \$2. However, a relative scarcity of hops in the fields, together with growers' demands for unusually "clean" picking, tended to lower the seasonal earnings of workers and provoked widespread unrest.¹⁵

The first small strike occurred on August 31. It ended quickly when the sheriff's deputies removed "agitators" from among the pickers. Ten days later a group of 100 out of 1,000 pickers employed on a large hop yard owned by a London company walked out in a demand for \$2 per hundredweight. Eight hundred more pickers in the yard soon followed.¹⁶ The strike was settled within 24 hours when the management raised the rates to \$1.75. Fifty strikers who refused the compromise scale were ordered off the ranch.¹⁶ A similar strike of a few hundred pickers broke out at the McLaughlin ranch, the scene of one of the 1933 incidents. It ended within a few hours when the pickers returned to work without winning their demands for a wage increase.¹⁷

¹¹Oregon Statesman (Salem), September 6 and 7, 1934.

¹²Idem, September 6, 1934 (p. 1).

¹³Idem, September 7, 1934 (p. 1).

¹⁴Idem, September 11, 1934 (p. 5).

¹⁵Idem, September 9, 1936.

¹⁶Idem, September 10, 1936 (p. 1).

¹⁷Idem, September 11, 1936 (p. 1).

Strikes in the hop-growing areas of the Willamette Valley were illustrative of labor relations in a crop in which neither workers nor employers were strongly organized. Unlike growers in the San Joaquin Valley of California, for instance, each operator was relatively free to determine the wages he paid. Wage levels varied widely among ranches, depending upon the estimated bargaining power which their crews could exert. The issue in each strike was decided in a very short time, as the crop was highly perishable. The pickers obviously could not be organized for long-sustained collective bargaining, as they were for the most part highly transient and poorly paid workers employed in each area for a few weeks at the most.

The only concerted attempt to establish a stable labor organization in Oregon agriculture occurred in the spring and summer of 1937. The business agent of the Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union of Seattle,¹⁸ with the help of the local Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union, established a sublocal in Portland. At its first meeting some 150 orchard and fruit-packing employees drew up a schedule of wage demands ranging from 37½ cents per hour for common labor to 60 cents per hour for skilled work in agriculture and allied industries.¹⁹ Subsequent attempts to control the hiring of labor for harvests in nearby areas brought strong resistance from grower-employers. More than 400 organized farmers of Hood River County voted unanimously to "refuse to consider any union demand for closed-shop conditions."²⁰

At a convention in Salem early in 1938 the Associated Farmers of Oregon was formed to establish a "Pacific coast hook-up" with its counterparts in Washington and California. In Oregon the main concern of this body was not with fighting the brief and weak organizations among agricultural laborers, but rather with combating the control exerted by urban unions over the transporting and marketing of farm products. The organized teamsters and longshoremen were the growers' special aversion. A spokesman of the Associated Farmers of Oregon at a meeting in April 1938 declared: "The time has come when farmers must organize to prevent violence and racketeering at the expense of the farmer, the laborers, and the public, and to put a stop to illegal interference with harvesting and marketing of farm products."²¹ Several restrictions proposed at the meeting were later incorporated as law in an initiative measure introduced during a general election—prohibition of picketing, boycotting, or interference by labor organizations with employers who were not actually engaged in labor disputes.²²

Pea Pickers' Strike in Idaho

Farm-labor conflict in Idaho was concentrated in the pea-growing areas of the Snake River Valley. Labor relations in this crop were particularly unstable, for a number of reasons. Peas were grown by large

¹⁸See p. 218.

¹⁹Oregonian (Portland), April 6, 1937.

²⁰Spokesmen of the farm organizations declared that farmers would not "tolerate labor interference with businessmen, truck operators, or themselves in handling the crops." (Christian Science Monitor, Aug. 31, 1937.)

²¹Oregonian (Portland), April 7, 1938.

²²Earlier the State Grange had taken the initiative in creating a new farm-labor relations committee consisting of three members appointed by the Grange and three by the Oregon State Federation of Labor. It was announced that "the primary purpose of the committee is to prevent misunderstanding between farmers and industrial workers by keeping both groups informed. In case of disagreement, the committee will attempt to find grounds for settlement which will be acceptable to both groups." (Oregonian, Portland, July 15, 1937.)

speculative companies, many of which leased the land from private owners. The crop was extremely perishable; thus the growers ran the double risk of its ruin because of adverse weather conditions or its loss in case of strikes called at the height of the season. Another reason lay in the highly seasonal demand for labor. Since the harvesting period was brief, lasting only a few weeks each season, and the resident population in the growing areas was sparse, many pickers had to be recruited from other, often distant, regions. Large numbers migrated each year from California, Arizona, Oregon, and Washington, as well as from States to the east.

Pea pickers employed in somewhat isolated growing areas became more "professionalized" than most seasonal farm laborers. Many of them worked exclusively in this crop, following successive harvests from State to State as well as working in some areas which had several harvests each year. This continuous seasonal work in the same crop created in the migrants a feeling of group solidarity; and this, together with the knowledge that the growers were unusually dependent on them, gave the pickers strong incentives to organize and act collectively for wage increases in such areas as the Snake River Valley.

Labor exploitation in many cases furnished additional stimulus to strike. The growers' dependence upon labor from other areas forced them to deal with professional labor-recruiting agents or contractors. These agents customarily agreed to harvest a crop for a fixed sum, from which they paid the wages of the pickers. They usually tried to reduce their wage costs to the minimum in order to increase their net profit, and this frequently led to labor unrest and strikes.

The first serious outbreak among pea pickers in Idaho arose during the summer of 1935. In June an acute labor shortage had been reported in the Parma area, with many acres of peas going to waste for want of pickers. The Idaho Emergency Relief Administration attempted to ease the situation by temporarily closing local work-relief projects, but this failed to provide sufficient labor. Instead, it created unrest among the relief workers because, as the Administrator pointed out, many who had been on relief for the past year or more had exhausted their resources and did not have the money to follow the pea harvest.²³

Trouble developed on several ranches which refused to hire relief workers, in violation of previous agreements with the IERA. There was further conflict when a number of white migrant and resident workers invaded several camps to "persuade" imported Filipino workers to leave the area.²⁴ Other scattered outbreaks culminated in a strike of pea pickers working in the summer crop of 1935. Early in August a group organized and demanded an increase in rates from the current 70 cents per hundred-weight to \$1 per hundredweight. When the growers refused these demands, approximately 1,500 pickers struck.

S. H. Atchley, attorney for Teton County, sent a hurried letter to Governor C. B. Ross of Idaho, stating that growers faced certain ruin if the crops were not harvested, and that "local authorities were powerless to make the workers work." Atchley asserted also that 90 percent of the pickers were willing to work, but were being stopped by 10 percent who were "agitators."

In response to this message, Governor Ross declared a state of martial law and sent a detachment of the National Guard to the strike area.

²³Boise Statesman, June 23, 1935.

²⁴Idem, June 18, 1935.

Picking was resumed upon arrival of the Guardsmen. Governor Ross stated in a press interview: "Deportation of about one hundred strike agitators has resulted in a return of the workers to their jobs, and law and order prevail again."²⁵

A second series of disputes followed during the summer of 1937. A small strike had occurred near Huston and Caldwell during May. The State Workers Alliance called a walk-out of onion weeders in protest against a wage cut from 25 to 20 cents per hour, and demanded that discrimination against employment of Alliance members cease. The strike ended in a compromise agreement.²⁶

A dispute began in the Cascade area during July among approximately 3,000 pea pickers, many of whom were from California and other States. Protest meetings and scattered strikes were blamed by local authorities on a "group of agitators" demanding wage increases above the prevailing 27 cents per hamper. Newspapers reported that the sheriff requested State aid to help control the situation.²⁷ No general strike developed, however.

Agricultural-labor troubles in Idaho during 1938 began in the beet fields of Bingham County with a threatened strike which did not materialize. A strike vote for a price of \$26 per acre for cultivating and harvesting beets had been taken in the unionized areas of Colorado and Nebraska, after the Department of Agriculture had set a minimum rate of \$22.80. Workers in the Snake River Valley, though not highly organized, all participated in the vote.²⁸ Later the Denver district headquarters of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America officially called off the threatened strike.

Strife in the pea fields broke out again during June 1938, when some 350 pickers struck in the San Diego Co. fields near Melba (Canyon County). This group had taken part before in a successful strike under U.C.A.P.A.W.A. leadership in Sacramento County, Calif. The walk-out in Idaho developed when the pickers charged the labor contractors with paying them less than they had been promised. The attempt failed within a week, after the county sheriff arrested strike leaders and members of the negotiating committee. Several hundred strikebreakers were successfully recruited to replace the strikers.²⁹ The sheriff said:

The growers of this county have put forth lots of effort in growing these peas, and they are going to have the full protection of the law in getting them harvested and marketed. (Boise Statesman, June 13, 1938.)

Strike leaders claimed that a field boss for the San Diego Co. appealed over the radio for 500 school children to pick peas.

Spontaneous collective action of another type took place near Driggs, Idaho, in September. Approximately 300 Mexican pea pickers quit their jobs and demanded to be paid off, in protest against what they claimed were top wages of \$1 per day for "third pickings." In doing so, they forfeited a bonus of 25 cents per hundredweight which, if they remained throughout the season, was paid in addition to the prevailing rate of 75 cents.³⁰

²⁵Salt Lake Tribune, August 18, 1935 (p. 1).

²⁶Idem, May 10, 1937. Growers offered a straight 20 cents per hour and, if they were able to sell the onions for 75 cents per hundredweight bulk, 25 cents per hour. If the prices went up to \$1 per hundredweight, they were willing to pay 30 to 35 cents per hour, and offered to sign a contract to that effect.

²⁷Salt Lake Tribune, July 31, 1937.

²⁸Idem, April 14, 1938.

²⁹Commonwealth News, Seattle, June 11, 1938.

³⁰Post Register (Idaho Falls), September 12, 1938.

The largest strike in the pea crop during 1939 took place in Washington. Approximately 1,000 pea pickers in the vicinity of Sequim struck spontaneously for a rate of 30 cents per hamper in place of the prevailing 20 cents. They returned to work within a few hours at a compromise rate of 25 cents.³¹

Farm-Labor Conflict in the Yakima Valley of Washington

Washington's most critical agricultural-labor problems were concentrated in the Yakima Valley in the central section of the State. Here one of the most intensive farming counties in the United States was devoted primarily to the cultivation of hop and apple crops, both with large labor requirements. This specialization led to extreme seasonality in labor demands. In winter months only 500 to 1,000 agricultural workers were needed in the Yakima Valley, yet 25,000 to 35,000 were required during the hop harvest in September and 5,000 to 6,000 during the apple harvest in October.³² Wage rates fell and conditions of employment became worse during the thirties. Housing and other facilities were notably inadequate and unsanitary. Various surveys estimated that annual incomes of seasonal farm-labor families averaged from \$254 to \$466. The majority required relief subsidies to raise their wages to a minimum subsistence level.³³

Few large strikes occurred, and stable labor organizations did not take root in the Yakima Valley. Unstable conditions of employment militated against the organization of farm workers for collective bargaining. Increasing numbers of urban unemployed and displaced farm families created a chronic labor surplus in agriculture. To many of these, perhaps to the majority, hop and apple picking offered a few weeks of employment with free shelter and some earnings when no other work was available. Migratory and casual laborers in these crops were an exceedingly heterogeneous group made up of Negroes, Filipinos, Indians, and whites. The whites, by far the numerical majority, included such diverse elements as "professional" migratory families, single migrants, or "bindle tramps," college and high-school students on holidays, urban unemployed, and "Dust Bowl" refugees from the Middle West.³⁴

Some new elements contributed a greater militancy in the Yakima Valley during the 1930's. A survey in 1937 revealed that almost three-fourths of all heads of hop-picking families ordinarily had found most of their employment in nonagricultural industries. Nearly a sixth of the hop pickers had been union members in their former occupations, having belonged to unions of longshoremen, waiters, miners, and forestry and wood workers, as well as other groups affiliated to the A.F. of L. and the C.I.O.³⁵

³¹Seattle Star, August 5, 1939.

³²Paul H. Landis: *Seasonal Agricultural Labor in the Yakima Valley* (in *Monthly Labor Review*, August 1937).

³³Carl F. Reuss: *Professional Migratory Farm Labor Households*, Bulletin of the Farm Security Administration (Portland, Oreg.), June 1940 (p. 2); Carl F. Reuss, Paul H. Landis, and Richard Wakefield: *Migratory Farm Labor and the Hop Industry of the Pacific Coast*, Bulletin No. 363, Agricultural Experiment Station, State College of Washington (Pullman, Wash.), August 1938 (p. 49); Landis, *op. cit.* (p. 2).

³⁴Reuss, Landis, and Wakefield, *op. cit.* (pp. 38-45, 62).

³⁵Idem (pp. 43, 48).

Race Conflict

Labor trouble often took the form of race conflict in the Yakima and Wenatchee Valleys because of unemployment among workers of different racial backgrounds. Indeed, the first serious anti-Filipino outbreak on the Pacific Coast occurred in the Wenatchee Valley of Washington in 1928. The usual explanation for the incident stressed the Filipinos' relations with white women. The underlying cause, however, was the increased competition for jobs when Filipinos were brought in by truck from Seattle to work in the apple harvest.³⁶ For substantially the same reasons, a mob of whites in at least one instance in the early 1930's forcibly drove Filipinos out of the Yakima Valley town of Toppenish. In later years Filipino strikers were run out of the county on several occasions. The most recent cases of widespread anti-Filipino activities were reported in 1937 by Filipino farm tenants in central Washington, who claimed that they were being evicted in large numbers and threatened with mob action.³⁷ The *Cosmopolitan Weekly* of Seattle on May 22, 1937, quoted from a Yakima newspaper as follows:

Hard-fisted, weather-beaten white ranchers from the lower Yakima Valley swore solemnly before Senator Lewis B. Schwellenbach that there soon will be bloody race riots that forever will be a blot on this State if the Federal Government does not move against Filipinos and Japanese, who unlawfully are crowding out the whites. Race conflict later involved other groups, particularly Negroes and Mexicans, as Filipinos in the Yakima Valley decreased in number.³⁸

Since racial minorities usually were imported by large growers and processors in search of cheap labor, resentment motivated by class consciousness might be expected from disadvantaged residents white workers. However, in a rural community where the temper of the population was predominantly conservative and the rights of the property holder were held sacred, resentment was directed against the alien as such. In some respects it was merely a special manifestation of the local residents' fear and suspicion of the outsider. Race conflict in the Yakima Valley sprang from much the same motivation as did the periodic raids carried out against hobos and transients.

The structure of farm operations militated strongly against the development of labor unionism among agricultural workers in the valley. Its agriculture, unlike that of other intensive growing areas, was not characterized by large-scale farming. Laborers, less concentrated than they would have been if employed on industrialized farms, were much harder to reach and organize. Employers in the valley were predominantly working farmers whose position was becoming increasingly precarious as the profitability of cash-crop farming in this area declined. Opposition to labor unionism was unanimous and strong, particularly as there were no extreme inequalities in wealth or size of operations to divide the ranks of farm employers. One observer described this rural community thus:

The whole culture of the valley is traditionally based on the agricultural life of the area. A large number of the farmers have dug the irrigation ditches and cleared the sagebrush of the land they now farm. Others are the sons of farmers who have done this. Because of this background some of the pioneer spirit still

³⁶Interview with Trinidad Rojo, President of Cannery Workers and Farm Labors Union, Seattle, 1940. (See Appendix J, p. 435).

³⁷*Philippine-American Tribune* (Seattle), Vol. VI, No. 2, January 27, 1937 (p. 1).

³⁸See Appendix J (p. 435).

prevails among the farmers. They believe in private initiative and the principle of individual contract. The local townsmen are also on the whole opposed to labor organizations. The police and the city and county officials are definitely on the side of the businessmen, and even the conservative A.F. of L. has not been able to gain a strong hold on local industry. The unions have practically no political power, and their social status is not high in the community. (R. R. Wakefield: *A Study of Seasonal Farm Labor in Yakima County, Washington, M.A. Thesis, 1937, State College (Pullman, Wash.), (p. 32.)*)

Unrest for the most part was passive, taking the form of a high rate of labor turn-over (less than 45 percent of the pickers interviewed in a survey of the 1937 harvest had worked in the valley before). Collective action was expressed at the most in small spontaneous strikes and race riots and, in a few cases, in the formation of short-lived local labor unions.

The I.W.W. in Yakima

The Industrial Workers of the World extended its activities to the Yakima Valley and other sections of Washington during World World I, but at least one strike of farm laborers in that State even in prewar years was reported as led by "wobblies."⁴⁰ Large numbers of casual migratory workers who were employed at different seasons of the year in lumbering, mining, and agriculture throughout the Middle West and Northwest regularly wintered in Seattle. That city became a center for labor agitation which culminated in the general strike of 1919. The State of Washington became noted for the virulence of its labor troubles (blamed largely on the "wobblies") and the extreme violence with which they were resisted in many centers.

The I.W.W. Agricultural Workers Industrial Union No. 110, formerly known as "The 400," became particularly active in the Yakima Valley and other intensive growing areas of the State in 1917. Rumors and reports of strikes and sabotage in agriculture became frequent. Newspapers throughout the country reported, for instance, that fruit trees in several orchard districts were killed by the simple expedient of driving copper nails into them.⁴¹ Such alleged activities gave rise to stern legal measures, and a special council of defense was formed. On July 12 Federal troops arrested some 16 I.W.W. organizers in Ellensburg, Wash., on the charge of "interfering with crop harvesting and logging in violation of Federal statutes."⁴² A general strike was reported to have been called by Local No. 110 for all agricultural, construction, and lumber workers in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana, as a protest against what were considered illegal arrests, but this evidently failed to materialize.⁴³

In the Yakima Valley a vigilante organization, or "pick-handle brigade," composed of farmers and businessmen was reported to have rounded up 40 to 50 alleged I.W.W. members and to have jailed them on charges of "agitation." It was said that the prisoners received nothing to eat while they were in jail, and that this led to a small riot which was quieted only when the fire department was called, to use fire hose. The prisoners were next herded into a boxcar to be taken out of the county, but the train crew refused to carry them. They were then returned to jail,

⁴⁰Brissenden, op. cit. (p. 366).

⁴¹Morning Republican (Mitchell, S. Dak.), July 13, 1917.

⁴²Idem, July 12, 1917.

⁴³Idem, August 18, 1917; August 21, 1917.

but were later released and warned to leave the area. Several charges of beatings were voiced against the vigilantes.⁴⁴

The I.W.W. in the Northwest was disrupted by the mass arrests of its leaders and violent suppression of rank and file activities. Volunteer walking delegates, nevertheless, remained active in numerous spontaneous or "job action" strikes among field and packing-shed workers in the Pacific Coast States throughout the twenties and early thirties.

I.W.W. agitation was partly responsible for the spectacular "Yakima incident" of 1933. Large numbers of unemployed transient laborers from other areas had congregated in Yakima for some time before apple and hop harvesting was to begin in the fall. A cut in local relief rolls aroused their resentment, and this was fanned by radical organizers. Public meetings were held in Yakima City Park, there were scattered disturbances and outbreaks of violence, and "strike talk" was in the air. The growers, alarmed at the situation, organized themselves into vigilante bands armed with pick handles.

The situation came to a head on August 24, when some 250 armed farmers clashed with a group of about 100 strikers picketing a large orchard near Yakima. The pickets were rounded up and jailed for several months in an improvised "bull pen" in the city. Most of them were in time released, 12 finally being convicted of vagrancy in December. Meanwhile all public meetings of workers were banned, transient camps and hobo jungles were broken up, and all surplus transient workers were kept out of the valley.⁴⁵

The severity with which labor agitation was thus suppressed impeded unionism in the valley for some time thereafter. Remnants of the I.W.W. continued to make gestures toward unionizing agricultural labor but they failed to develop any effective organization. As late as the fall of 1935 a meeting of farmers, threshers, and combine men was reported held in Waverley, Wash., under the auspices of Agricultural Workers Industrial Union No. 110. The group attempted to enforce a scale of wages ranging from \$1.50 per day for "hay hands, straw bucks, and roustabouts" to \$4.50 per day for steam engineers, separator tenders, and "herd punchers."⁴⁶

Federal Labor Unions of the A.F. of L.

Several federal labor unions were chartered by the American Federation of Labor in the Yakima Valley and other scattered agricultural areas of central Washington during 1934 and early 1935. Locals were established in such towns as Toppenish, Sunnyside, Grandview, Prosser, Dayton, and Kennewick. A district council of federal labor unions was created to coordinate the policies of these locals throughout the fruit belt, but the movement was not sustained. It never got beyond the stage of an educational campaign, and no direct action was taken. Most of the local unions lasted only a short time. The only ones which survived more than one season were Local No. 19399 of farm laborers in Grandview, and Local No. 19066, the United Evergreen Pickers of Centralia, composed of migratory workers who cut evergreens for decorations during the Christmas season.

⁴⁴Field notes from interviews.

⁴⁵For fuller discussion of this incident see Appendix K: The Yakima Incident of 1933 (p. 437). See also issues of the Yakima Morning Herald for July 17, August 29 and 30, September 1 and 7, 1933.

⁴⁶Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 3, October 1935 (p. 4).

Several unsuccessful attempts were made to unionize packing-shed workers of "produce row" in the city of Yakima. Finally in the summer of 1935 a federal labor union, the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union Local No. 20315, was organized and chartered, with headquarters in the Yakima Labor Temple. It was the best-organized and most-stable local union of this period. Of the 150 members in good standing (a large proportion of whom were women), many continued to pay dues during the off-season winter months in order to build a fund to finance an organizing drive during the forthcoming packing season of 1936. Unlike its unsuccessful predecessors, Local No. 20315 planned to include other workers besides skilled packers, such as pickers and employees of packing sheds, storage houses, processing plants, and canneries.

The organization was disrupted in the summer of 1936 by a jurisdictional dispute with the Brotherhood of Teamsters, which claimed control over truckers in packing sheds and warehouses. Local No. 20315 argued that it could organize effectively only as a vertical industrial union which would include all workers within each plant—truckers who operated primarily within the packing houses, as well as packers, loaders, graders, peelers, and other groups.

The two groups reached a settlement only after much strife and correspondence with the central executive council of the A.F. of L. in Washington, D.C. At a joint meeting in the Yakima Labor Temple the F.V.W.U. was persuaded to surrender its charter to the Brotherhood of Teamsters. In return, the latter promised to use its ample resources and strategic position to "organize everything on wheels," i.e., all labor in storage plants and warehouses, packing sheds and canneries.

The campaign was abandoned after a 3-month organization drive. The packing-shed workers' union lost a good part of its membership. Supporters of the Teamsters Union explained its failure by the strong and persistent opposition of growers and company executives. The workers, furthermore, had displayed increasing apathy and lack of interest. Competition from "Dust Bowl" refugees from the Middle West, who were beginning to arrive in large numbers, further disorganized the local union bodies.

Critics of the Brotherhood on the other hand explained its failure in the Yakima Valley by excessive timidity. One writer claimed that the Teamsters Union and the Yakima Central Labor Union on several occasions went out of their way to oust radical organizers, who were the most persistent in efforts at unionizing. The Brotherhood hesitated to include agricultural workers in its organization because of their alleged communistic tendencies. In a community in which even the conservative urban unions faced, at best, an unsympathetic public opinion, inclusion of radical elements, it was feared, would make the organized labor movement even less acceptable.⁴⁷

Activities of United Cannery, Agricultural and Packing Workers of America

The original organizers of the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union, some of whom were radicals expelled by the Teamsters Union, then

⁴⁷Reuss, Landis, and Wakefield: *Migratory Farm Labor and the Hop Industry of the Pacific Coast* (pp. 35, 36).

established a new independent local. Under the name of the American Industrial Union it obtained a charter from the State of Washington during the summer of 1936. This organization was composed of about 600 workers, evenly divided between urban and rural employments, and including unemployed as well. It purposely broadened its appeals so as to attract a wide class of casual laborers in the community.⁴⁸ Left-wing organizers aimed to have a union in existence which could be chartered by the C.I.O. when the fruit season opened. The American Industrial Union consequently was fought bitterly by the Teamsters and the Central Labor Union, as well as by local employer groups.

The American Industrial Union was dissolved early in 1937, and its membership was absorbed into newly organized locals of the International Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers Union and the Workers Alliance of America. The business agent of the Aqueduct and Tunnel Workers Union of the I.M.M. & S.W.U. was put in charge of all local C.I.O. organizations in the district, with power to grant charters. He planned to build up an industrial union to include farm laborers, warehouse and cannery workers.⁴⁹

District 1 of the newly organized United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America (C.I.O.) assumed jurisdiction over agricultural and allied labor in the Northwest after July 1937. Later in the year it made an arrangement with the Workers Alliance, whereby the latter was to maintain local unions of unemployed which could absorb U.C.A.P.A.W.A. members during off-season months and release them when they were reemployed during the harvest season.⁵⁰

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. expended a good deal of money and effort in a campaign to organize field and packing-shed workers in the Yakima Valley, but the results were not commensurate with the costs. A committee of 13 organizers campaigned throughout the area, addressing meetings of the Workers Alliance in valley towns and soliciting workers in homes and tourist camps.⁵¹ Nevertheless, by late September 1937, the president of District 1 reported that the Yakima Valley was represented only by Local No. 1 at Yakima, and sublocals Nos. 1-1 and 1-2 of Naches and Selah, respectively, having a total membership of 160. The charter of Local No. 70 of Walla Walla was canceled.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s efforts were neutralized in part by opposition from the A.F. of L. The Brotherhood of Teamsters adopted a policy of conciliation toward farm groups in order to win their favor. To forestall the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in Yakima it organized and chartered in August 1937 a new local, the Cannery and Warehouse Employees Union Local No. 83.⁵²

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. faced even stronger opposition from a newly formed anti-union organization of farmer-employers. For the purpose of

⁴⁸At a mass meeting held under the auspices of the American Industrial Union on July 14, 1936, for instance, a resolution was adopted demanding a minimum wage of 50 cents per hour for all labor in the Yakima Valley, and a uniform minimum wage of \$65 per month for WPA labor throughout the State of Washington. (Yakima Valley Farmer, July 16, 1936, p. 1.)

⁴⁹Reuss, Landis, and Wakefield: *Migratory Farm Labor and the Hop Industry of the Pacific Coast* (p. 36).

⁵⁰Wakefield, *op. cit.*; also Yakima Morning Herald, September 10, 1937 (p. 10).

⁵¹Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 8, August 1937 (p. 3); Yakima Morning Herald, August 24, 1937.

⁵²Yakima Morning Herald, August 19, 1937 (p. 1).

About the same time, at the Walla Walla convention of the State Grange (which was estimated to have 3,000 members in the Yakima Valley), the executive committee was instructed to bargain with "legitimate" labor organizations, with a view to protecting the interests of farmers. Dave Beck, district president of the Brotherhood of Teamsters, explained to the executive committee that it had become necessary for his union to organize the warehouse and cannery workers in self-defense, or see them organized by a competing union. He promised that farmers' crops would "not be tied up five minutes" by his organization. (Yakima Valley Farmer, August 19, 1937, p. 4.)

resisting local unionization of field and processing workers, the Farmers Protective Association was formed in August 1936, at a meeting held in the Chamber of Commerce headquarters in Yakima. In November 1937, it was reorganized as the Associated Farmers of Washington and affiliated in the "coast-wise hook-up" already mentioned.⁵³ Its effective anti-union tactics disrupted the organizing campaign of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. The association was aided by the huge influx of out-of-State migrants, which was increasingly demoralizing to organized labor. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. won minor victories against the Ross Packing Co. and Washington Dehydrated Food Co. when the National Labor Relations Board forced these to cease and desist from their anti-union practices and to rehire discharged union members. Its locals, nevertheless, failed to survive. The only important field workers' strike in which the union became involved in this district was the spontaneous walk-out, mentioned before, of 350 migrant pea pickers in the vicinity of Nampa, Idaho.

Recession and Decline

Late in the summer of 1938 a new and short-lived organization developed, with the name Washington Agricultural Workers Association. By August 20 its organizer, Frederick Brown, claimed that 500 members had been enrolled in the Yakima Valley. This body adopted a conciliatory attitude to farmer-employers. Its main appeal was based upon sectional hostility to the rapidly increasing numbers of drought refugees from the Middle West and Southwest, in search of work. Brown described his union as follows:

Our organization is not fighting for wages, because we realize that under present conditions the farmers cannot pay high wages. Our object is mainly to get the farmers to employ Washington workers and not transient workers from out of State. The farmers can get Washington workers if they call at the employment bureau in Yakima. (Spokesman Review (Spokane), August 20, 1938, p. 2.)

Growing unemployment combined with an unprecedented influx of out-of-State transients disrupted almost all labor organizations except those of unemployed during the recession year of 1938. Local newspapers reported that, for the first time in several years, hop growers in the Yakima Valley had a surplus of pickers on hand before the harvest began.⁵⁴ By the first week in September the State Employment Office in Yakima estimated that 33,000 hop pickers were in valley yards.⁵⁵ The chronic labor surplus forced the union organizers to direct their efforts primarily toward obtaining adequate relief for underemployed seasonal workers.

The only organization that gained in membership among field and processing workers in the Yakima Valley during 1938 was the Workers Alliance. By the end of the year this union of relief clients and unemployed claimed some 700 members in Yakima, 250 in Selah, 170 in Naches, and about 60 each in the towns of Toppenish, Wapato, and Harrah.

Group interest conflicted over relief policy in the Yakima Valley. During the middle thirties the County Commissioners of Yakima, who

⁵³Official Report of Proceedings before the National Labor Relations Board, Case No. XIX-C-298. Washington, February 28, 1938 (p. 343); see also Appendix L (p. 439).

⁵⁴Spokesman Review (Spokane), August 31, 1938 (p. 10).

⁵⁵Idem, September 4, 1938 (p. 12).

had administrative control over local work-relief projects, were for the most part substantial growers and employers. They made a practice of closing relief projects before the harvest season each year in order to release workers for farm jobs.⁵⁶ L. O. Bird, president of the Associated Farmers of Washington, publicly claimed the complete support of the county commissioners, who pledged that relief workers would be separated from WPA to work on farms "when conditions necessitated."⁵⁷ Critics charged the commissioners with following a policy of self-interest or class interest, to the detriment of farm workers' and relief clients' interests. Clyde Galloway, C.I.O. organizer, protested against this policy on the ground that it led to "flooding the valley with cheap labor."⁵⁸

Opposition to current relief policy became stronger in 1938, when the labor surplus was critical. A committee of the Workers Alliance protested to Frank Boisselle, county commissioner and large-scale hop grower, against the seasonal closing of WPA projects.⁵⁹ After numerous conferences with WPA officials in Yakima, an agreement was reached that workers would be reemployed on the projects whenever investigations in local hop yards revealed average wages of less than \$1 per day.⁶⁰

The Hay Balers Union

The only labor union in agriculture and allied industries in the Yakima Valley which survived after 1938 was the Hay Balers Union. This organization had been chartered in August 1934 as Federal Labor Union Local No. 19799, but became an independent body, severing its affiliation with the A.F. of L., late in 1937. Though its headquarters was in the Yakima Valley town of Toppenish, its jurisdiction extended to several eastern Washington counties to which its members migrated seasonally to work. The union included some 350 workers, with closed-shop agreements covering 65 to 75 percent of the acreage of commercially baled hay in eastern Washington.

The stability of the union rested on high pay and continuous employment for its members. The hay balers were a skilled migratory labor group working in crews with machinery. Contractors owned baling equipment, made contracts with farm owners, and hired the workers in crews which traveled from farm to farm baling crops at a set price per ton. The men were employed continuously for almost half the year, as several hay and alfalfa crops were grown in rotation. Hay baling could be staggered. Often the farm owner harvested his hay and alfalfa and kept it in stack, and not until he made a sale at a price suitable to himself would he have the crop baled and made ready for shipment.

The Hay Balers Union carried out two strikes, each of about a week's duration, during 1938 and 1939. They were provoked by competition from nonunion crews employed by hay and grain dealers from Seattle. Farmers who had their hay baled by union crews had to raise their price to the dealers in order to cover the increased labor costs. Several buyers hired their own crews who were nonunion and worked for less than the union scale. The local office of the State Labor Commissioner helped to settle both strikes through compromise agreement.

⁵⁶Spokesman Review (Spokane), September 17, 1937 (p. 1).

⁵⁷Report, NLRB Case XIX-C-298, Washington, February 28, 1938 (p. 468).

⁵⁸Spokesman Review (Spokane), September 16, 1937 (p. 1).

⁵⁹Idem, September 21, 1938 (p. 2).

⁶⁰Idem, September 11, 1938 (p. 17).

Cannery and Agricultural Unions on the Coast

The strongest unions of agricultural and allied workers in the Northwest were organized in the fruit, vegetable, and fish canneries on the Coast. A good measure of their strength lay in the support they received from urban trade-unions, particularly the Seattle locals of the A.F. of L. Brotherhood of Teamsters and the C.I.O. Maritime Federation of the Pacific.

Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union

The oldest and most powerful of these organizations was the Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union, or C.W.F.L.U., of Seattle. It was organized by Filipinos in 1932. In June 1933, it received its charter from the A.F. of L. as Federal Labor Union No. 18257. This was the first charter of its kind ever issued by the A.F. of L., granting jurisdiction over both cannery and field workers.⁶¹

The C.W.F.L.U. in the beginning was an exclusively Filipino union of Alaska salmon-cannery workers, but in time it broadened its membership to include workers of many races. By 1940 it was estimated to include some 2,000 Filipinos, 600 Japanese, 100 Chinese, and 250 whites, Negroes, Hawaiians, and Indians.⁶²

The C.W.F.L.U. was organized primarily to improve conditions in Alaska fish canning, and its major gains were won in that industry. Its most notable achievements were the elimination of the contractor system and the gaining of a closed-shop agreement providing also for a union hiring hall. Most of the strikes in which members of the C.W.F.L.U. took part, however, were in agriculture. As the canning season in Alaska lasted only for 8 to 10 weeks, the Filipino union members had to depend on other industries for their chief employment and livelihood. More than three-fourths of them were employed seasonally in agriculture; about half of these lived in California during the winter months, and many belonged to U.C.A.P.A.W.A. and independent Filipino agricultural-labor unions in that State.

"Job action" strikes in protest against long hours and low pay involved about 100 Filipino workers in truck-farming areas near Seattle, in the vicinities of Kent, Auburn, and Puyallup, during the spring of 1934. In spite of alleged vigilante action by local law-enforcement officers, the strikers were successful in raising wage rates from 15 to 25 cents per hour in the area. They were helped materially by Charles Doyle, secretary of the Seattle Trades and Labor Council, who negotiated with grower-employers on their behalf.⁶³

Communist labor organizations were temporarily active among agricultural and allied workers on the Coast. The Daily Worker on July 10, 1934, reported that the Agricultural and Cannery Workers Union led a strike of more than 500 workers on a large lettuce farm near Everett.

⁶¹Yearbook of the Cannery Workers and Farm Labor Union, 1937-38 (Seattle, Wash.), Vol. II, No. 2 (p. 22).

⁶²Interview, Trinidad Rojo, president of C.W.F.L.U., Seattle, Wash., August 21, 1940.

⁶³Yearbook of C.W.F.L.U. (p. 21).

Union spokesmen complained of wages of 10 cents per hour and 16-hour workdays, and charged that terrorism was used to quell the strike.⁶⁴ Local units of other organizations affiliated with the Communist Party remained active. Unemployed councils and branches of the United Farmers League were reported as carrying on agitation in the Puyallup area during 1934 and 1935.⁶⁵ The Trade Union Unity League organized a Fishermen and Cannery Workers Industrial Union to rival the C.W.F.L.U. It was dissolved less than a year later and the members were absorbed into the A.F. of L. local.⁶⁶

The C.W.F.L.U. expanded its jurisdiction over a wide area during the mid-thirties and became known as the "Little International." By late 1936 it claimed some 6,500 members in sublocals in the vicinities of Portland, Oreg., Anacortes, Everett, and Seattle, Wash., and Ketchikan, Alaska. These represented three main industrial groups—agriculture, fish canning, and fruit and vegetable canning.⁶⁷

Early in 1937 the locals began to prepare for a nation-wide convention to form a separate international union for workers in agriculture and allied industries. As a first step the Northwest Council of Cannery, Packinghouse and Agricultural Workers was formed, to coordinate the policies of nine local organizations claiming a total membership of 12,000. Most of these belonged to the C.W.F.L.U. and its branches. The council was dissolved when the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. (C.I.O.) was formed in July 1937, and the C.W.F.L.U. gave up direct jurisdiction over its branch locals. At present it is composed of U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Local 7 of Alaska fish-cannery workers and Sub-Local 7-2 of vegetable-canning workers in Seattle.⁶⁸

The C.W.F.L.U. was not very successful in applying collective bargaining in intensive agricultural areas of Washington. Truck farms in the rural areas near Seattle were generally small, hiring men in groups of six or less, so that both growers and employees were too scattered to be organized effectively. The Yakima Valley was too far from Seattle for the union to give adequate support to its Filipino members there, who constituted an insignificant fraction of the total labor supply recruited for the hop and apple harvests.

A strike by 50 C.W.F.L.U. members picking hops in the Yakima Valley during September 1937 brought swift reprisals from local authorities. The Filipinos started a sit-down strike in one hop yard in an effort to raise picking rates to \$2 per hundredweight in place of the prevailing \$1.75. Deputy sheriffs and State highway patrol officers promptly escorted them to the Kittitas County line and told them to "keep moving."⁶⁹ Union spokesmen claimed that "the Associated Farmers, with the aid of the State patrol, carted away a handful of the hop pickers to the county line, with the threat of a 'necktie party' if they attempted to return."⁷⁰

Vigilante tactics were also employed against Filipino members of the C.W.F.L.U. in the Puyallup Valley, a few miles south of Seattle, in the

⁶⁴Daily Worker, July 10, 1934.

⁶⁵Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 3, October, 1935 (p. 5).

⁶⁶Yearbook of C.W.F.L.U. (p. 21).

⁶⁷Idem (p. 22).

⁶⁸The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. won temporary gains in the fish-canning industry during 1938. In the spring two contracts were signed with 10 companies in the clam-digging and packing industry to cover 1,200 workers; clauses included wage increases to a base rate of 55 cents per hour, sole collective-bargaining rights, and preferential shop. Unions included were U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Locals Nos. 62 and 239 of Aberdeen. (CIO News, Vol. I, No. 15, March 19, 1937, p. 1.)

Again, in November 1938, more than 2,500 fish-cannery workers in the Grays Harbor area won a closed-shop contract with wage increases of 2½ to 15 cents per hour, through Locals Nos. 238 and 239. (Idem, Nov. 28, 1938, p. 5.)

⁶⁹Spokesman Review, September 10, 1937; Yakima Morning Herald, September 10 and 12, 1937.

⁷⁰Yearbook of C.W.F.L.U. (p. 22).

spring of 1937. The union business agent attempted to open negotiations to set a standard wage scale of 35 cents per hour, an 8-hour day, and 40 cents per hour for overtime, instead of prevailing wages of 25 cents per hour or less. A strike was called by union members when negotiations failed, and picketing began early in April.⁷¹ A week later a vigilante band composed of local growers and businessmen, reported to have been led by Mayor Woodin of Kent, drove the pickets from the valley. Strong pressure from urban trade-unions and sympathizers subsequently forced the growers to resume negotiations and come to a compromise agreement with the union.⁷¹

The C.W.F.L.U. acted primarily as an employment agency for its members working in agriculture. Union representatives made contacts with individual growers and came to verbal agreements regarding wages, housing, working conditions, numbers of hands required, etc. Only one written contract was ever signed between the C.W.F.L.U. and organized growers. This covered strawberry pickers on Bainbridge Island, Wash., where the growers were predominantly Japanese.⁷²

A.F. of L. Cannery Unions

One other strike of importance occurred in industries allied to agriculture. This involved fruit and vegetable cannery workers organized by the A.F. of L. During 1937 and 1938, that organization had formed five federal labor unions of local cannery workers in the vicinities of Friday Harbor, Mount Vernon, Bellingham, Puyallup, and Olympia, having a total membership of about 5,000. Prior to the opening of the canning season in May 1938, a wage dispute developed between 22 canneries in western Washington and the five A.F. of L. unions, when operators cut wages 5 cents per hour below the minimum wage scale of 52½ cents for men and 42½ cents for women, established in the previous year's agreement. The union called a "hold off" strike when negotiations ended in a stalemate, and refused to begin work until the wage cut was restored. The canners contended that much of the previous year's crop was still unsold in the warehouses and that any wage increases would have to be borne by the farmers, since the public would not buy so much of the product at a higher price.⁷³ The Associated Farmers exerted pressure on the Associated Producers and Packers Incorporated to consider the interests of growers in wage negotiations, but the cannery workers' unions refused the latter's offers of mediation.⁷⁴

The dispute finally was settled by compromise agreement when the international representative of the A.F. of L. negotiated for the cannery workers. Collective bargaining between cannery unions and employers in later years was carried out on a more localized basis, because of differences between areas in products and market conditions. The unions in general were able to win better wage and hour provisions than those applying in competing nonunionized areas of eastern Washington and Oregon.⁷⁵

⁷¹Philippine-American Tribune (Seattle), Vol. VI, No. 8, May 4, 1937 (p. 1).

⁷²Idem, April 24, 1937.

⁷³Seattle Post Intelligencer, May 3 and 5, 1938.

⁷⁴Idem, May 5, 1938.

⁷⁵Puyallup Tribune, May 10, 1940.

CHAPTER XIV.—The Sheep Shearers Union of North America

Sheep Shearing in the Rocky Mountain Region

The first stable trade-union among agricultural and allied workers developed in the sparsely settled livestock-raising areas of the Rocky Mountain region. Sheep raising in the Western States, although a type of extensive pastoral farming, was nevertheless an intensive industry using a great deal of labor. Many sheep ranches became large, specialized enterprises raising a commercial product for sale in distant markets. They hired gangs of migratory laborers for a few weeks during the shearing season each year. The contacts between employers and employees became increasingly casual, distant, and impersonal as the scale of operations grew.

The sheep shearers developed as a distinct occupational group when specialized sheep ranching became concentrated in the Mountain and Pacific Coast States. Improvements in railroad and steamship transportation, particularly after completion of the Panama Canal, opened up eastern wool markets and encouraged the raising of sheep instead of cattle—a source of considerable conflict and violence between stock raisers. As sheep raising became a commercialized industry instead of a mere adjunct to the farm, proprietors came to depend upon an itinerant group of skilled sheep shearers. The more migratory workers in following the shearing season sometimes traveled from the Mexican to the Canadian border in a period of a few months. Established routes of interstate migration lay through a region encompassing New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Washington. Numerous more localized migrations developed within each State.

Sheep shearers, because of the nature of their occupation, had stronger bargaining power than other migratory agricultural workers. Shearing is a skilled occupation requiring care and accuracy if the wool is not to be ruined. Unshorn wool is a highly perishable product; a delay in shearing during warm summer weather lessens its value considerably, because of the accumulation of dust, grease, and vermin on the sheep.

The supply of sheep shearers available for ranchers is limited by many factors. Besides requiring considerable training, the work is highly seasonal and lasts only some three months even with continuous travel over an area covering several States. During the major part of the year almost all shearers depend primarily on other employments for their livelihood. Large numbers are themselves sheep raisers, particularly in the southern Mountain States of New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona. After they have sheared their own sheep and helped their neighbors, they follow the shearing to northern States, where the season comes later in the summer. Localities in which shearing operations take place, and where potential shearers usually have to learn the trade, are relatively inaccessible to any large body of workers. This is particularly true of the sparsely settled ranching areas of Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, where the union became established most strongly.

Origin, Structure, and Tactics of the Sheep Shearers Union

Very little is known about the origins of the Sheep Shearers Union of North America (A.F. of L.), because it developed in a highly seasonal and migratory labor group in an area where transportation and communication facilities were poor. It was preceded by several short-lived local unions, the earliest of which was organized in 1895 under the name of United Sheep Shearers. The present organization was chartered as a local union in Rawlins, Wyo., in 1912. After it had grown considerably in membership, it moved its headquarters to Butte, Mont.

Their technical skill and limited numbers enabled sheep shearers in the Mountain States to develop a small but prosperous and well-organized union which has managed to maintain a high level of wages. The extreme mobility of the membership over a wide and sparsely populated region required a decentralized union structure. The Sheep Shearers Union, having a local charter in Butte, claims jurisdiction "over North America." Union members, while at work during the shearing season, elect delegates by secret ballot to the union convention which takes place every 4 years. There the delegates in turn nominate and elect officers to the executive board. This body, among its other functions, on or before February 1 of each year sets the union scale for shearing sheep. Any member shearing at less than this scale is liable to suspension.¹

The application of union standards to the job is left to the more or less spontaneous local action of itinerant shearing crews. Union shearers are instructed to hold a meeting and elect a chairman before going to work on any job. The chairman then appoints a business committee of three members, whose duty is to negotiate an agreement with the sheep raiser (subject to the approval of a majority of the crew), stipulating the union price for shearing and an adjustment of grievances at the corrals. Crews have the right to strike without prior authorization from the executive board.²

Collective bargaining by the Sheep Shearers Union has led to few large and spectacular strikes of the kind common to other migratory-labor organizations. The union's effectiveness has rested on manipulating the labor supply in each local area during the shearing season. Where the members constitute a significant proportion of the total labor supply, closed-shop contracts and written agreements have rarely been necessary in order to maintain union standards. The mere threat of a "stay-away strike" or labor boycott, by subjecting sheep raisers to the danger of losing their wool crop, in many cases has been sufficient to bring them to terms. Wage rates have been standardized at the union level for member and nonmember shearers alike over wide areas.

The Sheep Shearers Union has not been a typical agricultural labor organization. Through most of its career it has been, rather, a well-financed and cohesive craft union of highly skilled workers, characteristic of A.F. of L. affiliates in certain urban trades. The S.S.U. early

¹Constitution and Bylaws, as amended at Second Quadrennial Convention, Butte, Mont., July 1939. (pp. 4, 7, 21).

²*Idem* (p. 4).

The strike must be supported by vote from three-quarters of all union members in the locality affected. Bylaws state that union members must elect a strike committee of seven. From these the chairman appoints three members to a finance committee to handle strike funds. A complete record of all expenditures pertaining to a strike must be forwarded to the executive board before members are eligible for disbursements from the union's strike emergency fund. (*Idem*, pp. 21-22.)

established an 8-hour day in many localities and has maintained piece rates ranging from 12½ to 15 cents per head of sheep.³ (The output per man ranges from 100 to 200 or more sheep sheared per day.) The dues are high for a union in the general field of agriculture; initiation and reinstatement fees are set at \$33 per member, and annual dues at \$27. With this money the union maintains important services for its members.⁴

Machine techniques have replaced hand shearing. Unlike many craft labor organizations, however, the Sheep Shearers Union does not seem to have been weakened by these developments. Displacement has not been great, for power shearing has not proved to be very much faster than hand shearing.⁵ The sheep industry, in response to a steadily rising demand for wool, has expanded more rapidly than has the productivity of labor from the use of new techniques, so that the total employment of shearers has grown considerably since the union was first organized.

The union was unique among labor organizations in the way in which it controlled technological change, for the union itself went into the manufacture and sale of new labor-saving machinery. E. Bartlett, a former president of the union, developed and patented one of the best and most widely accepted power shears. The S.S.U. acquired the patent, and as a corporation it sold shares to its members in order to raise sufficient capital to manufacture the equipment. The patent expired several years ago, and companies such as Stewart Warner and the Chicago Flexible Appliance Co. now market power shears and other equipment in competition with the union.

The S.S.U. meanwhile has broadened its marketing activities. The union-owned Sheep Shearers Merchandise & Commerce Co. does a wholesale and retail business in shearers' equipment and accessories of all kinds, including power shears. This company sells its goods to both union and nonunion shearing crews, who customarily must furnish their own equipment. Members are allowed a 20-percent discount from the regular prices, as a means of encouraging affiliation to the union.

The introduction of power shearing has changed labor relations within the occupation. Individual migratory hand shearers have for the most part disappeared. Shearing by power-driven machines requires the cooperative efforts of numbers of men working together in gangs. These move from one area to another throughout the sheep-raising region, taking with them their camping outfit, power plant, and movable corals.⁶

The method of recruiting shearers is similar to that among other migratory agricultural workers. The direct employer of the shearers is a contractor, plant man, or captain similar to the Mexican contractor for cotton pickers in Texas. He solicits the work, furnishes the shearing machinery and accessory equipment, hires and pays the shearers, and

³This rate does not include board provided by the employer in kind or cash at the rate of \$1.50 per day or 2 cents per sheep sheared.

⁴\$5 from each of these charges per member is contributed to the total-disability, old-age-pension, and burial fund. This provides a pension of \$25 per month to members of 10 years' consecutive standing who are totally disabled through old age or accident, and disburses burial expenses to the families of members. The cash disbursement varies according to the members' years of affiliation to the union. Members who have been in good standing for only 1 year receive up to \$40; members of 2 years' consecutive standing receive \$75; for 3 consecutive years, \$100; for 4 consecutive years, \$125; for 5 consecutive years, \$150; and for 6 consecutive years, \$175. This is the maximum paid. (Constitution and Bylaws, p. 17.)

⁵The most common estimate seems to be that a man who formerly could shear 130 sheep per day by hand shears can now do about 175 by power shears.

⁶The typical unit is a motor carried on a truck which supplies power through flexible attaching-rods to some 12 or 16 power shears or clippers handled by individual shearers.

frequently provides their board, lodging, and transportation. In high-wage States like California or Montana the contractor has usually received 3½ cents per sheep and the shearers 12½ cents, in addition to board and lodging. The union is strongest among itinerant crews, who are usually the most skilled in the trade. Contractors are included in the union and are subject to numerous regulations governing the hiring of union crews, use of equipment, and wage rates paid for various jobs.⁷

The bargaining power of the union has tended to be weakened by improvements in transportation and communication, rather than by technological change within the sheep-shearing trade. In the old days employers had to rely upon itinerant shearers who traveled by horseback or by train; they frequently had to meet their shearers at the nearest station and transport them to the ranches in buckboards. Often individual shearers worked for the same rancher year after year.

Automobile transportation has made the occupation more casual. Shearers now travel in their own cars or in trucks provided by contractors for their crews. Many pick up jobs where they can find them, just as do cotton pickers and other migratory agricultural workers. Shearing crews consequently have lost much of their group cohesiveness. The Sheep Shearers Union as a type of cooperative agency also has had to relinquish a great deal of its control over the allocation of workers and their jobs. Wool growers are no longer so dependent as formerly upon the union to recruit adequate crews. Correspondingly, the S.S.U. has had increasing difficulty in attempting to force growers to adhere to the terms of verbal agreements.⁸

The main competition facing union members has come from the Southwestern region, including Texas, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and southern California, where large labor supplies are available in rural areas. The union's strength centers in the sheep-raising areas of central and northern California, Utah, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana, where labor is relatively scarce and shearing rates are high.

Labor Trouble in the Thirties

Competition of labor from the Southwest became particularly severe for the Sheep Shearers Union during the 1930's. Wage rates were

⁷Article I of the constitution provides, among other things, the following regulations:

Section 20.—Any member booking a nonunion shearer in preference to a union shearer shall be subject to suspension from this union.

Section 21.—No member shall be refused work if he so desires, so long as there are no idle pens equipped for shearing at that plant. Members violating this rule shall be subject to suspension.

Section 22.—Members making up crews are requested to include one member of 60 years or over, where available. All members are urged to see that members are not discriminated against on account of their age.

Section 23.—Any member running a machine plant or doing grinding for himself or crew without adequate compensation for such work shall be subject to suspension.

Section 24.—Any member running a machine plant or doing grinding for an unfair crew shall be subject to suspension.

Section 25.—Where members of this union have established a fair margin for grinding, contracting, or furnishing machines in any district, no member shall enter the same field at a lower rate for similar work. This would be a serious offense and violators are liable to expulsion.

⁸The union receives many complaints against ranchers who request that shearers be sent out to a job. When they arrive at ranches they may find that their places have already been taken, and that they have paid the expenses of transportation for nothing. In such strongly unionized States as California or Montana the S.S.U. can appeal to the State Labor commissioner, who may force ranchers to hire the men or at least pay them for transportation and time lost.

affected by both a decline in wool prices and an increasing labor supply arising from unemployment in other industries and trades. From 1930 to 1933 the union declined to its lowest membership in decades.

The union revived strongly after the National Industrial Recovery Act was passed in 1933. During 1934 and 1935 it began a unionizing drive in the hitherto unorganized States of Texas and Arizona, which had been a major source for nonunion migratory shearers. Later it attempted such restrictive measures as the union label and the closed shop in order to protect the position of its members.

The union campaign led to several large strikes. About 1,000 shearers in Missoula County, Mont., struck for 6 days during May 1933 against a reduction in wages. A month later some 500 shearers in Matrona and Loraine Counties, Wyo., were involved for 2 weeks in a strike over the same issue.⁹

Sheep Shearers' Strike in Western Texas, 1934

The S.S.U. suffered a serious defeat when it attempted to unionize the shearers in western Texas in 1934. Employment conditions in that area were radically different from those in the northern Mountain States, and the union found it virtually impossible to establish stable collective-bargaining relations. It encountered bitter and violent opposition from organized sheep and goat raisers and finally had to abandon its campaign.

The sheep shearers of Texas, unlike those of the Mountain States, have never constituted a well-unionized labor aristocracy. They had been one of the first occupational groups to migrate in large numbers from Mexico to Texas. During the middle and late nineteenth century, when the livestock industry was expanding rapidly, most of the year-round laborers tending cattle and sheep on South Texas ranches were Mexican "vaqueros" and "pastores." Gangs of sheep shearers later began coming across the border twice a year, for periods of about 2 months each, to supply the seasonal demands of the ranches.¹⁰

As the cattle and sheep industry moved farther north and west in Texas, the Mexican shearers tended to become permanent residents employed most of the year at unskilled ranch jobs. A number of them also migrated seasonally to other sections of Texas to find intermittent employment in cotton and other crops. For the most part, however, the shearers in Texas, unlike those in the Mountain and Pacific Coast States, remained casual ranch hands who rarely migrated far from their residences. Their bargaining power was weak. The supply of Mexican labor remained large, while strong traditional racial and class divisions kept them in a status beneath white men. Wage rates for sheep shearing in Texas were considerably lower and working conditions were poorer than in other States. Shearers in Texas during the early and middle thirties were generally paid 5 to 6 cents per sheep, as compared with 12 to 15 cents in Wyoming, Montana, or California. They averaged \$2.50 to \$3.25 per day during the season, making an average yearly income of \$400 to \$700. General ranch laborers (including most of the

⁹Tosiah C. Folsom: *Labor Disputes in Agriculture, 1927-38.*

¹⁰Origins and Problems of Texas Migratory Farm Labor, prepared by the Farm Placement Service Division of the Texas State Employment Service (Austin), 1940 (p. 10).

shearers in the off-season months) customarily received \$1.00 to \$1.50 per day or \$20 to \$25 per month for steady employment.¹¹

Sheep ranching, like cattle ranching, became large-scale, highly centralized, and owned or controlled by absentees. The land in western sheep and goat raising counties is characteristically sparsely settled and owned in large tracts of several thousand acres each.¹² The ranches are often in the hands of hired white managers who supervise the Mexican ranch laborers while the owners, living in adjacent small towns or cities, are concerned chiefly with commercial and financial arrangements with banks, loan companies, wool buyers or brokers, wool and mohair warehouse companies, and the like. These enterprises, acting through such organizations as the Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers Association and the Texas Wool and Mohair Warehouse Association, exert considerable influence on the ranchers' business affairs and labor relations.

The first attempts at organization and collective bargaining were carried out not by hired shearers but by "capitans." Their prime motive was to regulate competition for labor as well as to establish standard shearing rates with sheep ranchers. A union of capitans was formed in the winter of 1925; the representatives met with officials of the Sheep and Goat Raisers Association, and a shearing price of 10 cents for sheep and 6 cents for goats was agreed upon. The union soon disbanded, however, because individual capitans failed to live up to their agreements to restrict the cash advances to their shearers.¹³

Capitans, sheep shearers, and general ranch labor jointly participated in the next attempt to organize a union. This occurred in 1933, under the double stimulus of rising prices for wool and other commodities and Federal Government's encouragement to unionism.

The official Sheep and Goat Raisers Magazine announced for 1933 the "sharpest recovery ever staged in the history of the wool industry. * * * Prices of both raw and finished products soared spectacularly during the year." The NRA was gaining in effectiveness, and its labor provisions were highly publicized. Mexican ranch laborers in the vicinity of San Angelo, Tex., met and formulated demands for \$2.80 per 8-hour day or \$40 to \$50 per month for steady employment, in place of the prevailing \$1.00 to \$1.50 per day or \$20 to \$25 per month with no restrictions on hours.¹⁴ Ranchmen had difficulty in convincing the workers that they were not covered by the NRA. According to the September 1933 issue of the magazine—

A committee of Mexican ranch workers called on J. C. Deal, San Angelo Board of City Development manager, and was not convinced until Deal communicated with Washington, D. C., and received confirmation of earlier instructions.

Open conflict and strikes did not develop until shearers in several sheep-raising counties were organized by the Sheep Shearers Union of

¹¹Sheep and Goat Raisers Magazine (San Angelo, Tex.), Vol. 14, No. 2, September 1933 (p. 23); Vol. 14, No. 6, January 1934 (p. 101).

¹²Sutton County, for instance, has a total population of about 3,000. Seven or eight families are estimated to own 75 to 90 percent of the land in ranches, some of which are more than 25,000 acres in size. The large landowners are descended from old southern families who settled in the area following the Civil War. They spend most of their time in the town of Sonora and visit their ranches only once or twice a week. The ranches are managed by hired white superintendents, who supervise the Mexican ranch labor. The only other whites in the county are a few in white-collar jobs and proprietary and skilled trades in Sonora, the county seat, and a few scattered towns. (Field notes.)

¹³Sheep and Goat Raisers Magazine (San Angelo, Tex.), Vol. 14, No. 6, January 1934 (p. 101). The capitan, like the labor contractor in some crop areas, often advanced credit to his seasonal laborers during off-season months in order to maintain them and to be sure of an adequate labor supply. During a period of relative prosperity and alternative job opportunities, however, he had no guaranty that he could hold his workers, and thus risked losing his credit outlays.

¹⁴Idem. Vol. 14, No. 2, September 1933 (p. 23), and No. 7, February 1934 (p. 126).

North America. By the beginning of 1934 the S.S.U. claimed to have 750 members in the area. Representatives and members formulated demands in accordance with union standards: Union recognition and shearing rates of 12 cents per head for sheep and 8 cents for goats, as compared to the prevailing rates of 8 cents and 5 cents, respectively.¹⁵

Organized landowners and warehousemen tried immediately to counteract the S.S.U. Representatives of wool and mohair warehouse companies and ranchmen of 25 western counties held a conference on January 4th at the First National Bank of Sonora (Sutton County) under the chairmanship of T. A. Kincaid, president of the Sheep and Goat Raisers Association, and J. M. O'Daniel, president of the Texas Wool and Mohair Warehousemen's Association. They voted to refuse recognition to the Sheep Shearers Union and to maintain maximum shearing rates at 8 cents for sheep and 5 cents for goats.¹⁵

The discussion at the conference indicated strong anti-union sentiment and distrust of labor. H. W. Ruck declared bluntly that the union was a "racket." Chairman T. A. Kincaid opposed higher wage rates on the ground that "90 percent of the shearers gamble away their earnings each night around the camp."¹⁵ He expressed the opinion that "Mexicans are being urged along like a bunch of sheep led by a lead goat into a car." Their actions showed, he claimed, that they were ungrateful for the facts that—

* * * Mexican children are being educated, that the Mexicans pay little if any taxes, that they have equality of opportunity on public works, that they are getting more from CWA than anybody else in the ranch country.¹⁵

The close relationship between sheep raising and urban business and financial interests was indicated in motions and amendments of several rancher delegates to allow banks, loan companies, and warehouses to determine the shearing rates.¹⁵

Several hundred sheep shearers in the spring and fall shearing seasons of 1934 struck in scattered local "stay-aways," or labor boycotts, on ranches which refused to pay union rates. The movement continued for several months and brought sporadic incidents of violence from both sides. It was ineffective where general unemployment made large supplies of labor available, and where Mexican shearers, lacking political influence, had little legal protection.

Many part-time ranch hands were dependent upon public relief, and this rendered the Sheep Shearers Union vulnerable to strikebreaking. Late in February 50 west Texas ranchmen went to Austin to persuade Government officials to discontinue relief to shearers who refused employment at prevailing wages. C. B. Braun, Assistant Administrator of State Relief in Austin, subsequently announced that Mexicans who refused shearing or other ranch jobs would be made ineligible for relief. R. E. Taylor, Relief Administrator for Sutton County, announced further that all shearers were to be dropped from relief rolls, even if they had not done any shearing for years. Ranchmen were encouraged to give the names of clients refusing jobs to their county relief boards so that they could then be declared ineligible. T. A. Kincaid said:

We are a pretty poor bunch of white men if we are going to sit here and let a bunch of Mexicans tell us what to do. They have organized a bunch of foreigners that this country has taken care of.¹⁶

¹⁵Sheep and Goat Raisers Magazine (San Angelo, Tex.), Vol. 14, No. 6, January 1934 (p. 101).

¹⁶Idem, Vol. 14, No. 7, February 1934 (p. 126).

The Sheep and Goat Raisers Association in February discussed obtaining the services of Texas rangers to patrol the sheep and goat belt, in anticipation of trouble during the coming peak of the shearing season. The only untoward incidents up to that time had been an alleged incendiary firing of two shearing machines belonging to Del Rio capitans who had made contracts with nonunion shearers, and the arrest of two unionists in Del Rio for "intimidation" of nonunion men.¹⁶

As a further means of breaking the strike such companies as the Del Rio Wool & Mohair Co. and the Producers Wool & Mohair Co. bought shearing machines and hired crews directly. Thus they were directly competing with established capitans, some of whom had joined the strike or had been unable to recruit full crews. Several white crews were put into the field to replace organized Mexicans on strike. Spokesmen of the ranchers claimed that the whites did better work.¹⁶

The official organizer of the Sheep Shearers Union for Texas complained of "forceful opposition" from the Sheep and Goat Raisers Association, supported by the local press and law-enforcement agencies. Some 42 union members altogether were reported arrested and jailed, and a union organizer charged that extralegal vigilante methods were employed by ranchers against strikers on several occasions.¹⁷

By March 1934 the Sheep and Goat Raisers Association claimed to have broken the strike. Its magazine announced that shearing had been completed for more than three-fourths of the goats, and that the same number of sheep were already being shorn, while many thousand additional sheep were covered by contracts for shearing at rates fixed by the association.¹⁸

Spokesmen of the organized ranchers, nevertheless, seemed to be undecided about the merits of collective bargaining. In an editorial entitled "The Shearing Situation," the official magazine complimented the association on the "wonderful job" it had performed in bringing together the representatives of ranchers from 25 counties to fix maximum rates for shearing. Then followed the observation that—

* * * the shearing situation in Texas today is in better shape than it has ever been before. * * * Competition is the life of all trades. The white crews in competition with the Mexican crews put a different phase on the shearing situation.¹⁹

Later in the year Joseph S. Meyers, Conciliator from the U. S. Department of Labor, sought to bring the Sheep and Goat Raisers Association into agreement with the Sheep Shearers Union. The association refused the conciliator's request to call a meeting for discussion of shearing rates on the ground that it had no authority to make contracts with shearers

¹⁶Sheep and Goat Raisers Magazine (San Angelo, Tex.), Vol. 14, No. 7, February 1934 (p. 126).

¹⁷Letter to Harry Acreman, executive secretary of the Texas State Federation of Labor, Austin, March 10, 1938, from the Sheep Shearers Union organizer in San Angelo, Tex.

One example was a local incident in Sutton County during the fall shearing season, described by a rancher participant thus:

"In October 1934, Ramon Bill, a Mexican capitan of a shearing crew, tried to organize all Mexican crews in Sutton County into one shearing union. The purpose of this was to get higher pay for the work. At the time, ranchers were paying 8½ to 9 cents for sheep. Bill wanted all crews to strike for 10 cents.

"On October 23, 1934, Bill sent word to a crew working on the Arthur Simmons ranch that unless they struck, he and his crew would come out to the ranch and stop them from working.

"Several ranchers got word of the threat and Bill and his men were stopped as they left Sonora and arrested for disturbing the peace. Confidentially they were told that they would be shot if they ever mentioned union again.

"As far as we know this is the only time there was ever any union activity of any type in Sutton County." (Field notes.)

¹⁸The capitans were reported as having been "a little backward" about making contracts, but were now "falling into line." Dozens of nonunion crews were listed as having made contracts. (Sheep and Goat Raisers Magazine, Vol. 14, No. 8, Mar. 1934, p. 141.)

nor to buy or sell anything for its members. Ranchers informed Meyers that the shearing question was "individual, between ranchmen and shearers."¹⁹

Strikes and Labor Trouble in California and Neighboring States

The Sheep Shearers Union suffered worse defeats in organizing campaigns in California and adjoining States during the middle and late thirties. It had won a few union agreements with State wool growers' associations, but these had not been renewed. After 1933, the S.S.U. continuously attempted to reach an agreement with the National Wool Growers' Association or its various State subdivisions. These bodies, being primarily marketing agencies, consistently refused the union demand, asserting that they had no power to bind their members to any fixed standard of wages, working conditions, or terms of hiring and firing.

A unionizing campaign in California during 1934 resulted in property damage and arrest. Four union members were tried and sentenced to several years' imprisonment on charges of arson. Local law officers pictured the incident as a "widespread plot to terrorize sheepmen of Solano and Yolo Counties into paying wages demanded by the Sheep Shearers Union."²⁰ Officers of the union disclaimed official responsibility for the acts, and commended the local law authorities and the court for "fair and impartial instructions to the jury."²¹

The S.S.U.'s worst defeat came during the spring season of 1938, when it attempted to enforce signed collective-bargaining agreements upon wool growers throughout the western sheep-raising region. Early in the year the union announced that it would apply the closed shop, uniform union wage scales, and the union label to the wool industry. It enlisted the aid of key unions in transportation, the A.F. of L. Brotherhood of Teamsters and the C.I.O. International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union, both of which were in a strategic position to support the shearers' demands.²² Harry Bridges, president of the Maritime Union, informed representatives of the western wool growers' associations by letter that his organization would support the S.S.U.:

The Sheep Shearers Union of North America has notified us that as of January 1, 1938, they are placing a union label on all products handled by their members. This label has been sanctioned by all labor unions affiliated to the Committee for Industrial Organization and the American Federation of Labor.

We, therefore, feel it is advisable to notify you that the Committee for Industrial Organization recognizes the Sheep Shearers Union label, and that we are cooperating with them in their organizing program. (Quoted from Arizona Republic, February 21, 1938.)

Organized wool growers in seven Western States moved to nullify the threatened union action. Shipment of wool by water from Pacific Coast ports was vulnerable to sympathetic strikes and "hot-cargo" boycotts on trucking lines and water fronts. The wool growers planned to

¹⁹Sheep and Goat Raisers Magazine, Vol. 14, No. 10, May 1934 (p. 184).

²⁰California Wool Grower, March 5, 1935 (p. 4); Vallejo Times-Herald, December 28, 1934.

²¹Corning Observer, February 19, 1935.

²²The western wool industry has what it calls a "break line" running from Montana to Arizona. West of this line—in the States of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, and Arizona—the growers find it economical to truck wool to the Pacific Coast ports for shipment by ocean transport to Boston or Philadelphia.

utilize railroads as an alternative means for sending wool to eastern markets. W. P. Wing, secretary of the California Wool Growers' Association, suggested the slogan: "Ship your wool by rail and avoid bottlenecks and Bridges."²³

The transport unions, however, failed to give the promised support to the Sheep Shearers Union. According to spokesmen of the Waterfront Employers' Association, Harry Bridges in February assured a committee of San Francisco employers that all wool delivered to Pacific Coast ports would be handled by longshoremen irrespective of whether it bore a union label.²⁴ Organized teamsters in Sacramento, according to spokesmen of the S.S.U., refused to recognize picket lines established by striking shearers around the docks. In Washington and Oregon the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America (A.F. of L.) gave limited sympathetic strike support to the union.

Lacking unified support from other labor organizations, the union's organizing campaign in 1938 came to little. Conflict occurred in Arizona during February, when union agents attempted to organize several non-union shearing plants and later called a strike to raise wage rates to the union standard. In one minor clash 47 members, including the union president, A. A. Evans, were arrested on charges of "rioting" and "raiding" a plant in which a strike was called. The union countered with complaints laid before the National Labor Relations Board, stating that nonunion shearing-plant operators had violated the Wagner Act by intimidating union members and refusing to bargain collectively.²⁵

A strike of several hundred union shearers occurred in California during late March and April over the closed-shop and union-label issues. The California Wool Growers Association, claiming to represent 60 percent of the State's sheep raisers, had refused to negotiate with the Sheep Shearers Union.²⁶ S. P. Arbois, director of the association, claimed that it had no power to negotiate labor agreements with unions. He described it as "merely a service organization. All labor agreements have to be carried out by members acting individually."²⁷

The strike began in Kern County and spread north through other central and eastern California counties. John Crawford, president of the newly established California branch of the S.S.U., claimed by April 1 that only 40 nonunion shearers were at work in the vicinities of Woodland, Davis, and Bakersfield, where normally some 700 workers were employed.²⁸ The strike was officially extended on April 10 to cover the entire Pacific Coast and Mountain sheep-raising region, including the States of California, Nevada, Montana, Utah, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. Most shearing operations had not yet begun, however, in States other than California because their seasons came later.

The union encountered opposition from growers in California, who in the end were able to break the strike. They were strongly organized

²³Corning Observer, February 8, 1938 (p. 7).

²⁴In one instance, union butchers employed in a meat-packing plant in Tacoma, Wash., refused to kill "hot sheep" bought from a ranch which was involved at the time in difficulties with the Sheep Shearers Union. This action was overruled by Patrick Gorman, national president of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, on the grounds that it unnecessarily penalized the packing company involved, putting it in a position of disadvantage with its competitors. Furthermore, it was felt that without the support of key labor groups like the teamsters and freight handlers, sympathetic strike action to help the Sheep Shearers Union placed unreasonable burdens and responsibility upon the Amalgamated. (California Wool Grower, Feb. 22, 1938.)

²⁵Arizona Republic, March 1, 1938 (p. 3).

²⁶San Francisco Examiner, April 2, 1938 (p. 3).

²⁷Idem, April 3, 1938 (p. 10).

²⁸Idem, April 2, 1938 (p. 8).

in county associations, which in turn backed the State Wool Growers Association. Levies were raised from individual members, and the powerful Associated Farmers supported a drive to recruit nonunion shearers. This organization opposed the union demands for a closed shop and union label on wool, fearing that the principle would be extended to other crops. (The C.I.O. union, U.C.A.P.A.W.A., was at that time dominant among field workers and was preparing to undertake a State-wide organizing drive.)

The San Joaquin County Wool Growers Association announced formation of the Associated Sheep Shearers of California, a type of company union. Spokesmen announced that shearers would be selected from the new organization regardless of union affiliation and would be paid the union scale of 12½ cents per head. Crawford, president of the California Sheep Shearers Union, repudiated the new organization as "undoubtedly sponsored by the Associated Farmers of California as well as the Wool Growers Association, who favor an open shop in the wool industry."²⁹

Two hundred wool growers from San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Contra Costa Counties at a mass meeting voted to assess themselves 1 cent per sheep for a "war chest" with which to fight the closed-shop strike.³⁰ They also announced publicly that they would employ and assure full protection to any sheep shearers, regardless of union affiliation, who would work under strike conditions. They were followed several days later by 300 wool growers of Napa, Marin, and Sonoma Counties, who in a meeting in Santa Rosa on April 12 likewise resolved to operate a joint hiring hall and raise an anti-union fund.³¹

The Associated Farmers sent agents to other States to recruit shearers who would take the places of the strikers. By mid-April nonunion shearers from Texas and other States were reported to be flocking into the sheep-raising areas of California.³²

Law-enforcement officers in several counties cooperated closely with organized wool growers and the Associated Farmers. Sheriff Ben Heard of Glenn County described his method as follows:

I called the sheep men together * * * I put the cards before them * * * and contacted different members throughout the State.

We organized throughout our county a group of farms. We had to carry out the work of patrolling and moving these several [sheep-shearing] plants, of which we had 12 at one time, then 10, sometimes 8, 4, and 2. On these we put as high as 8 guards, 6 at night and 2 in the daytime. * * *

The Associated Farmers coordinated them * * * we moved most of the sheep shearers into a larger plant and they tried to prorate the sheep. They [Associated Farmers] fed the men and sheared the sheep and paid the guards. (Hearings of La Follette Committee, Part 75, pp. 27631-27632.)

Under such combined pressure the strike collapsed after a month. The defeat cost the Sheep Shearers Union several thousands of dollars and weakened it for some time to come. Its membership, which early in 1936 was estimated by one official as including some 1,100 out of approximately 3,000 professional shearers in the United States, had declined by July 1938 to about 700, or less than 25 percent of the number employed in the industry.

²⁹San Francisco Examiner, April 2, 1938 (p. 7).

³⁰Idem, April 8, 1938 (p. 8).

³¹Idem, April 13, 1938 (p. 9).

³²Idem, April 22, 1938 (p. 10).

Present Status

Both public and private groups have begun to compete with the union for control of the sheep-shearing trade. A union official termed such competition "a conscious effort by particular groups who want to make a 'good thing' out of a high-paid trade." One private employment agency, the Inter-Mountain Circuit, has some 200 nonunion shearers on its rolls. The agent locates jobs by making contacts with plant and ranch operators and recruiting sheep shearers by telegram. The Circuit, in return, collects yearly fees or dues from the shearers.³³

The S.S.U. has been concerned about the practices of such institutions as the Utah State College of Agriculture at Logan, which has introduced a course in sheep shearing for its students. Union officials consider the course a threat to their organization, since it is a potential means for developing a larger local labor supply in the State. Growers in the future will be likely to hire fewer migratory shearers, among whom the union is most strongly organized. On the other hand, a major part of the shearing in Utah, at least of smaller flocks, has always been performed by local workers. Many of the migratory workers who shear flocks in several States of the Inter-Mountain area come from small communities in Sanpete County, Utah. In recent years a few Mexicans have been employed seasonally at shearing in eastern Utah, and some shearers from California and Arizona have been entering Utah to work after the season is finished in their States.

Increasing competition from many sources has weakened the bargaining position of the Sheep Shearers Union and impelled it to seek the support of other organizations. After its defeats in 1938, the S.S.U. affiliated with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of America, so as to insure sympathetic action from this more powerful organization. Wool growers fear that this alliance will lead to a more ambitious attempt than in 1938 to extend union control, in the form of the closed shop and union label, throughout the sheep industry. They envisage "hot cargo" boycotts applied by union butchers in packing houses which buy sheep from wool growers.

The bargaining power of the Sheep Shearers Union of North America is likely to be greatly strengthened by present conditions. Increased demand and higher prices for wool have stimulated expansion in the sheep industry. At the same time, the number of nonunion sheep shearers has been decreasing, because of the Army draft and the huge expansion of employment in war industries. The union members' position is made more secure by the fact that most of them are middle-aged men.

³³Shearers affiliated both to the Circuit and to the union periodically complain of "chiseling" agencies and "schools" which operate in Texas and New Mexico. One such, advertising by radio, offered to teach sheep shearing for a price and to guarantee jobs for its "graduates." Such agencies place their men, it is charged, by cutting the wages and getting a substantial "rake-off." They have been rumored to accept shearing rates of 10 cents per head (where the union and the Circuit have a standard 12 cents), and from this they collect a fee of 4 cents to 5 cents a head from the men they place. (Field notes and interviews.)

CHAPTER XV.—Beet Workers in the Mountain States

Labor in the Sugar-Beet Industry

A special agricultural labor problem developed in the Rocky Mountain States during the twentieth century as sugar-beet production became concentrated in that region. It was a distinctly submarginal or sweatshop industry that depended upon public protection and financial subsidy in various forms. As an intensively cultivated crop grown in sparsely settled areas it relied also upon cheap seasonal labor imported from other areas.

Commercially grown beets were first introduced into Colorado about 40 years ago, and during the two decades following World War I the State averaged almost one-third of the total acreage and output for the United States.¹ Weld, Morgan, Larimer, Logan, Adams, and Boulder Counties, lying immediately north of Denver, became in the order named the heaviest beet-producing areas in the country. The Great Western Sugar Co., operating mainly in this district, was estimated to be producing by 1930 more than 80 percent of all beet sugar in Colorado and almost 45 percent of all produced in the United States.²

Sugar-refining companies, as monopolistic buyers, gained an increasing domination over beet growers. Sugar beets, unlike other types of agricultural produce, were not sold competitively in central markets. Their bulkiness and perishability required that they be grown in the immediate vicinity of the refining plant, which was the sole market for each grower's crop. The processors' control often extended even beyond this market relationship. Frequently a refining company financed the growers' production outlays, maintained a staff of agricultural superintendents and field men to supervise farm operations, and recruited the labor hired by growers to cultivate and harvest their crop.³ The terms of purchase, sale, and supervision over production were stipulated in detail in contracts made between processors and producers prior to the planting season. Refining companies found such contracts necessary to insure an adequate supply of beets, and growers considered them desirable as assurance of a certain market at predetermined prices.

The low earnings, high seasonality and disagreeable nature of the work made beet-field labor unattractive to resident workers of the Rocky Mountain States. Labor supplies from other regions consequently had to be tapped. The Great Western Sugar Co. and other refiners recruited thousands of Mexican families from southern Texas and Mexico for the beet fields of Colorado and neighboring States. Company agents sent out circulars and newspaper advertisements, held public meetings, and provided transportation for the workers.

A peculiar pattern of labor relations developed. Refining companies endeavored to standardize labor costs as well as prices of sugar beets by means of seasonal labor contracts between growers and workers in

¹Sugar Beets: Changes in Technology and Labor Requirements in Crop Production. WPA National Research Project, Washington, 1937 (pp. 6-13).

²Paul S. Taylor: Mexican Labor in the Valley of the South Platte, Colorado, University of California. Publications in Economics, 1928; Thomas F. Mahoney: Industrial Relations in the Beet Fields of Colorado, address at the Third Catholic Conference on Industrial Problems, Denver, April 21, 1931 (p. 1).

³Paul S. Taylor, Mexican Labor in the Valley of the South Platte, Colorado (p. 114).

each factory district. These contracts specified the acreage allotted to each laborer, the manner in which the work was to be performed, wage rates and time or manner of payment, terms of hiring and firing, and settlement of disputes. Company field men were usually stipulated as arbitrators in case of disagreement between growers and laborers.

The interests of the grower-employers and the processing companies tended to diverge over the labor question. In the last analysis the refiners determined wages and working conditions by the contract price they paid for beets. At the same time they could shift the burden of responsibility for the workers' welfare upon the immediate employers, the growers. While beet acreage was expanding, the companies were eager to attract and maintain a large resident labor supply in order to cut down the costs of recruiting and transporting workers from distant areas. Hence they favored higher wages than the growers were willing to pay. In earlier years the companies also had provided free housing and other facilities for the workers and had attempted to smooth the process of social and occupational adjustment for the Mexican and Spanish-American laborers.

The refining companies, in brief, were concerned with keeping labor satisfied with its position, even though at a low standard of living. Every effort was made to prevent any feeling of injustice or exploitation among beet workers. Growers were urged to be diplomatic in their treatment of Mexican laborers and to be as liberal as possible in meeting their needs. Companies endeavored to educate farmers in every aspect of personnel work or labor relations.⁴

Mexican beet workers were recognized, nevertheless, as constituting a chronic labor problem in Colorado even in the most prosperous years of the twenties. The Colorado State Council of the Knights of Columbus, for instance, had formed a special Mexican welfare committee as early as 1923, to carry on social work and charity among beet laborers. In its fifth annual report for 1928 it stated: "We * * * believe that by indifference to social justice, Colorado is—unwittingly—but nevertheless actively, cooperating with the forces of radicalism and disorder."⁵

The most obvious problems facing the beet laborer were poverty and squalor imposed by low wages, seasonal employment, and absence of alternative opportunities for earning a livelihood in the sparsely settled Rocky Mountain region. Family earnings even in the best of times averaged only \$600 to \$650 per year.⁶ By the mid-thirties annual family earnings had declined to averages estimated as low as \$220 for beet work and \$72 for other employment. The proportion of beet laborers on relief ranged from 37 to 97 percent in different areas. Poverty was accompanied by distinctly substandard housing, child labor, pauperism, and deficiencies in education and health.⁷

A more serious problem in the long run was the Mexican beet laborers' distinct status as a lower caste, which they held because of their poverty, color, and cultural attributes. Their position in Colorado in

⁴Taylor, *op. cit.* (pp. 142, 157-160).

⁵Fifth Annual Report, Mexican welfare committee of Colorado State Council, Knights of Columbus (Pueblo, Colo.), May 28, 1928 (p. 1).

⁶Paul S. Taylor: Mexican Labor in the Valley of the South Platte, Colorado; also, Thomas F. Mahoney: Problems of the Mexican Wage Earner, address at the Catholic Conference of Industrial Problems, Denver, May 12, 1930 (p. 2).

⁷Wages, Employment Conditions, and Welfare of Sugar Beet Laborers, U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Serial No. R. 703, Washington, 1938 (pp. 4-5, 14-16); R. W. Rosskelly: Beet Labor Problems in Colorado, paper presented at the thirteenth annual meeting of the Western Farm Economics Association (Pullman, Wash.), July 10-12, 1940 (pp. 4, 5).

many ways came to parallel that of Negroes in the Southern States. "White trade only" signs appeared in business establishments in some towns, segregation in seating arrangements was imposed in moving-picture houses, residential restrictions were applied to real estate, and a sentiment for segregation in schools became widespread.⁸ Mexicans and Spanish-Americans also faced discrimination before the law. The Mexican welfare committee of the Knights of Columbus in its annual report for 1928 stated:

Protest is becoming more general against the abuse, injustice, and grossly unfair treatment of the Spanish-speaking people by certain Colorado constables, law-enforcement officers, and justices of the peace * * *. As things now stand, for a Mexican to be arrested and accused, is to be convicted. And to be arrested and accused in many instances it is only necessary to have money to pay the fines and costs which the judge may assess.

Racial divisions were reflected in labor relations in the beet fields. Beet growers were for the most part family farmers who hired year-round farm hands of the old-fashioned kind, who ate at the same table as their employers. These personal relationships did not extend to the Mexican beet laborer. The regular field work—plowing, planting, irrigating, and cultivating in spring and summer, and beet lifting and hauling by machinery in the fall—was commonly performed by white American farmers and hired men. The tasks of weeding, hoeing, thinning, and topping, which were not considered "white men's work," were left to seasonally employed Mexicans.⁹

Beet work was characterized by a high rate of turn-over. In one survey it was found that beet laborers on the average had worked 2.35 years for their present employers, and 51.7 percent of those interviewed were working for their present employers for the first time.¹⁰ In many places the Mexicans lived in company-owned houses rather than on the farms on which they were employed. Sometimes, it was said, a farmer used farm dwellings as a bargaining device to make the beet workers adhere to his personal whims.¹⁰ A situation of near-peonage developed where beet workers depended upon their employers for credit (deducted from future earnings) for subsistence during off seasons.¹¹

Widespread dissatisfaction became evident among Mexican beet workers in Colorado by the late twenties. Second-generation immigrants in particular tended to resent the incompatibility of their disadvantaged status with the democratic American principles which they learned in public school. To quote Dr. R. W. Rosskelly of Colorado State Agricultural College:

Logic suggests the impossibility of scoffing at the Mexican culture patterns, of indoctrinating them with those of the Nordics and still expecting them to perform a type of labor and live under conditions which Nordic standards taboo. Neither can it be expected that they will willingly relegate themselves to the status of second-class citizens in a country where equal opportunity, regardless of race, is the symbol of freedom. (Beet Labor Problems in Colorado, p. 10.)

⁸Paul S. Taylor: *Mexican Labor in the Valley of the South Platte, Colorado* (pp. 216-223); R. W. Rosskelly, op. cit. (pp. 8, 9).

⁹Paul S. Taylor: *Mexican Labor in the Valley of the South Platte, Colorado* (p. 102).

¹⁰R. W. Rosskelly: *Beet Labor Problems in Colorado* (pp. 5 and 6).

¹¹Thomas F. Mahoney: *Problems of the Mexican Wage Earner* (p. 6).

"The system of giving credit for food and supplies during the winter to be paid out of the next season's work is also to be condemned as being a menace to the economic liberty of the Mexican and Spanish workers in the sugar-beet industry. Under this plan he will start to work in the spring handicapped by a debt to the sugar company which will reduce the amount coming to him in the fall. Every winter this burden of debt may be increased until in a comparatively short time many of these Mexican workers will find their freedom of contract so limited that they will be compelled to labor under whatever terms or conditions may be imposed upon them."

Beginnings of Unionism

The disadvantaged social and economic position of Mexican laborers stimulated unionism in the sugar-beet fields. Poverty and low social status became unacceptable when imposed by collective bargaining between sugar companies and beet growers' associations. The laborers were impelled to organize in self-defense, seeking to improve wage rates and working conditions by bargaining collectively with producers and processors in an evenly balanced triangular relationship.

The beet workers' unions were concentrated in northeastern Colorado, in counties adjacent to Denver. Only a few brief local organizations ever developed in the beet-growing districts of southern Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, or Montana. Field workers near the metropolitan area could enlist the support of strongly established urban trade-unions. Denver has long served as a focal point for transportation and communication in the Mountain States. It has been the headquarters for major industrial, financial, and governmental agencies serving the region, and the nerve center for Colorado's militant labor movement.

Certain distinctive features of labor relations in the sugar-beet industry, on the other hand, impeded effective labor unionism and collective bargaining. Beet workers lived and worked individually or in small scattered groups on small farms, in contrast with the gangs or crews employed on large agricultural enterprises. Working conditions varied widely among individual farms. Hence it was difficult to bring laborers together in agreement over issues which would find general acceptance. The system of individual contracting between growers and workers was an additional deterrent, despite the fact that it served to standardize wage rates and terms of employment. As the price for beets was determined by contract before cultivation began, organized workers had little or no opportunity to change the wage scale by threatening to strike at the strategic harvest period.

The I.W.W. and Mexican Radicals

The first attempt to organize beet workers in the Mountain States was made during the twenties by the Industrial Workers of the World. The Agricultural Workers Industrial Union No. 110 as early as 1920 reported having official organizers in Colorado and Nebraska to campaign among workers in the sugar-beet crop,¹² but there is no evidence to show that this organization gained any influence in these areas.

Early in 1927 the I.W.W. was active in a strike among coal miners in southern Colorado, a large proportion of whom were Mexicans and Spanish-Americans. There was much occupational mobility between mining and farming in some localities. The I.W.W., however, was unable to organize unions among farm laborers as it had done among miners.¹³ Nevertheless, spontaneous organization and agitation among Mexicans in northern Colorado beet districts created a widespread though groundless fear that beet workers were being organized by the I.W.W. to strike for higher wages. Attempts were made for a while to prevent

¹²The Industrial Worker (Everett, Wash., official organ of the I.W.W.), October 30, 1920, stated:

"Members of the A.W.I.U. No. 110 have started a drive this year throughout the beet fields of Colorado and Nebraska. A traveling delegate is at present going through these States. There are bumper crops around Sterling, Brush, and Greeley."

¹³Paul S. Taylor: *Mexican Labor in the Valley of the South Platte, Colorado* (p. 159).

field laborers from holding meetings of any kind, and there were even some demands that soldiers be sent into the beet fields to "intimidate" the Mexicans.¹⁴

Directors of the Beet Growers' Association subsequently met with Mexican beet workers' committees in amicable conferences. Spokesmen for the laborers presented petitions for improved housing, clean drinking water, sanitary facilities, and guaranties that they would be paid for their work. The president of the Beet Growers' Association stated that the workers' demands were reasonable and promised to grant them as soon as possible.¹⁵

A greater source of worry in certain quarters was what the Mexican welfare committee of the Knights of Columbus termed the "Red Socialist menace." According to that body, propaganda and "educational" work were being carried on among Mexican beet workers by representatives of certain radical organizations of Mexico. The agitation had begun in Colorado in 1926 as a nationalistic movement in support of the Calles regime in Mexico,¹⁶ but later became associated with the Mexican C.R.O.M. labor movement. Apparently no strike action was undertaken by its leadership.¹⁶

The A.F. of L. and the Beet Workers' Association

Collective bargaining along union lines was first attempted during the late twenties. Officials of the Colorado State Federation of Labor from time to time met with local committees of beet workers who had grievances they wished to present to their employers, and endeavored to help such groups organize and formulate their demands. The federation late in 1927 became more active in forming local groups or committees of Mexican beet workers in communities where they were concentrated in off-season months—Denver, Longmont, Loveland, Fort Collins, Greeley, Fort Lupton, Rocky Ford, and Pueblo, among others. Loosely organized associations were formed in which the local community leader—the accepted spokesman for the laborers in each locality—was chosen to act as secretary, to call meetings, and to give each group some continuity. There was no regular system of union dues; informal collections at meetings and money raised at social activities provided the main sources of revenue.

The State federation in 1928 persuaded the executive council of the American Federation of Labor at Washington, D. C., to provide an experienced organizer for the Mexican beet workers. The State body planned to enlist them in federal labor unions which in time would be federated into an international union for the industry. A well-educated

¹⁴Fifth Annual Report, Mexican Welfare Committee of the Colorado State Council, Knights of Columbus, 1928 (p. 6).

¹⁵Fourth Annual Report, Mexican Welfare Committee of the Colorado State Council, Knights of Columbus, Denver, 1927 (p. 2).

¹⁶Fifth Annual Report, Mexican Welfare Committee, 1928 (p. 6).

"These radicals at present seem to be mostly doing educational work among the Spanish-speaking people * * *."

"They have frequent closed meetings in Denver and in and near the smaller towns in the sugar-beet districts. These meetings are really schools for the teaching of Communist and other radical doctrines. Their propaganda is directed along anti-Catholic, anti-religious, anti-organized government, and on Mexican-political lines. It is to some extent in this country a sort of 'Help Calles' movement."

"This work has been carried on quietly but persistently for several years in Colorado and other parts of the Southwest. Their leaders, while using the existing bad conditions effectively to attract and make converts, do not seem to want labor troubles. They seem for the present to have some other purpose in view * * *."

and able Spanish-American printer and member of the Typographical Union, C. N. Idar, came to Colorado for this purpose. As he had been a successful organizer for the A.F. of L. among the Mexican cotton pickers in Arizona during 1920-21,¹⁷ and later among the Mexican laborers in various industries along the lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas, he was considered well fitted to unionize beet workers of the same race in the Mountain States.

Idar was active in this region throughout 1928 and 1929, attempting to organize federal labor unions in every colony of beet workers in Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming. Charters were issued to local unions, and these were encouraged to keep a nucleus of 10 or 12 members paying regular monthly dues the year round in order to maintain the organization in good standing. A special concession also was granted to these unions, in that their members, a large proportion of whom were unemployed or nonresident during part of each year, were required to pay dues only during the months they were employed. Usually just enough was collected from each local to pay the minimum per capita dues required by the constitution of the A.F. of L. In exchange for this concession, restrictions were imposed on the locals' right to the strike benefits from the A.F. of L.

These local unions of beet workers at one time had a total membership in the Mountain States of more than 10,000 members, most of them in Colorado, according to a former official of the Colorado State Federation of Labor. In 1929 they were brought together into a loosely formed organization known as the Beet Workers' Association. The membership included several elements whose philosophies differed rather widely. Representatives of the I.W.W., who during early 1927 had led strikes of Mexican and other foreign-born coal miners in Colorado, had some influence among the beet workers. Communists, who hoped to recruit beet workers to the newly organized Trade Union Unity League, were numerically insignificant at that time. Many local representatives in the association were strongly nationalist in sentiment, for the status and prestige of a community leader among Mexicans rested upon his upholding, at least vocally, their rights as a national minority.¹⁸ Some representatives favored the formation of a separate union, exclusively Mexican and unaffiliated with other organizations. Others sought to obtain a charter from the State federation for an all-Mexican or Spanish-speaking organization whose members would be allowed to work in other unionized industries. The federation refused this request on the ground that it would segregate workers by race or religion rather than by trade or industry.

Prevailing sentiment apparently favored affiliation with the A.F. of L. This was expressed in a convention of some 200 delegates of the Beet Workers' Association at Fort Lupton in August 1929, which was attended by the president and secretary-treasurer of the Colorado State Federation of Labor.¹⁹ The A.F. of L. executive refused to grant an international charter to the association until it proved able to maintain itself as a permanent, self-sufficient organization. At the thirty-fifth annual convention of the Colorado State Federation of Labor at Fort Lupton in June 1930, Frank Corpio, president of the Beet Workers'

¹⁷See Chapter XII (p. 195).

¹⁸Representatives of the Mexican Government at that time were charged by radical and conservative groups alike with propagandizing Mexican-born workers in this country.

Association, stated that his organization would be able to affiliate formally with the A.F. of L. within a year.¹⁹

The association disintegrated soon after this convention. C. N. Idar was forced because of illness to discontinue his activities as an A.F. of L. organizer. He was not replaced, as the A.F. of L. at the time was faced with declining revenue and the need to retrench. Surplus labor displaced from other industries flooded the beet fields in the ensuing period of depression and unemployment. Native white Americans, who had traditionally shunned this occupation, now competed with Mexicans. Most of the union locals passed out of existence; the few remaining existed in name only.

The United Front Committee of Agricultural Workers Unions

Discontent among beet workers became widespread during the early depression years, because of increasingly severe unemployment and a rapid decline in wage rates. Wages were cut 25 percent in the northern Colorado district from 1930 to 1931, from \$23 per acre and a bonus of 50 cents per ton for harvesting on yields over 12 tons, to \$18 per acre and a bonus for yields over 14 tons.²⁰ By 1932 wages had been reduced to a record low of \$12 to \$14 per acre. The customary standardization of contract rates and working conditions was disrupted by cut-throat competition among growers selling beets and among surplus laborers seeking jobs. The Mountain States Beet Growers' Association claimed to have had no voice whatever in determining either the beet-production contracts or the labor contracts with sugar-refining companies.²¹ A report by the Colorado State Industrial Commission described conditions in the beet fields as "industrial slavery." Wage rates were at such low levels that beet workers, in order to exist, required charity even while at work.²²

Growers at the same time were having financial troubles. The Great Western Sugar Co. and other sugar-refining firms were losing money for the first time in many years,²³ and consequently set lower prices for beets they bought from farmers. Prices for other crops fell even more, so that growers had no choice but to accept. An official of the Mountain States Beet Growers' Association stated publicly:

Returns to farmers under their individual contracts with the Great Western Sugar Co. are so uncertain and indefinite that the growers have been virtually forced to get their labor at starvation wages. (Rocky Mountain News, May 20, 1932, p. 10.)

Left-wing elements gained influence among beet workers at the expense of the more orthodox or "reformist" adherents of the A.F. of L. and the former Beet Workers' Association. The Agricultural Workers Industrial League was formed as the Colorado counterpart of California's Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, both subsidiaries of the Communist-controlled Trade Union Unity League. The League

¹⁹Proceedings, Thirty-fifth Annual Convention, Colorado State Federation of Labor, Denver, June 1930 (pp. 3 and 30).

²⁰Thomas F. Manoney: Industrial Relations in the Beet Fields of Colorado, address at the third Catholic conference on industrial problems, Denver, April 21, 1931 (p. 3).

²¹Rocky Mountain News (Denver), May 20, 1932 (p. 10).

²²Idem, May 16, 1932 (p. 1).

²³The Financial History of the Great Western Sugar Company, an outline compiled by J. F. Rasmussen, consulting engineer for the Colorado Farmers Union, Denver, 1939.

took the initiative in organizing new local unions of beet workers, and in some communities it revived inactive locals of the Beet Workers' Association. The A.W.I.L. had new branches in Greeley, Fort Lupton, Fort Collins, and Denver, while in other centers it enlisted the support of various non-Communist organizations. The leading organizers were reported to be Anglo-Americans who had been active in various Communist groups in Denver.²⁴ A number of Spanish-speaking organizers campaigned locally among Mexicans and Spanish-Americans.

A conference of representatives from both the orthodox and left-wing factions among the beet workers was held in Denver in February 1932, and the United Front Committee of Agricultural Workers Unions was formed. Delegates formulated demands for a basic contract price of \$23 per acre and recognition of the United Front Committee, and decided to form local committees in each factory district and beet workers' colony in Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming. A central committee was elected to represent organized workers from these scattered growing areas.

Delegates of the United Front attempted several times to negotiate with representatives of beet growers and sugar companies but were unsuccessful. A strike finally was called on May 16, 1932, after a series of mass meetings had been held in Fort Lupton, Fort Morgan, Brighton, Fort Collins, and other beet centers of Colorado. It began about one week before the thinning season reached a peak. One leading organizer announced that he expected 20,000 workers to respond,²⁵ but any accurate estimate of the number who actually participated is impossible.

The labor situation was unfavorable for collective action, and the movement collapsed within a few weeks. It could not be coordinated effectively over so wide an area, ranging from the Arkansas Valley in southern Colorado to Greeley and Fort Morgan in the northeastern counties. The United Front Committee was a loosely organized mass movement containing divergent groups which did not work well together. Left-wing elements accused some of the more conservative or "reformist" local organizations, such as the Spanish-American Citizens' Association of Fort Collins, of helping to break the strike through refusing to cooperate with other labor groups. Some were charged with replacing strikers in the beet fields, spreading unfavorable rumors, and meeting openly with officials of the Great Western Sugar Co. and other employers.

The strike was not timed strategically. Sugar beets were not perishable at the weeding and thinning stage, and these operations could be delayed for some time to the increasing discomfort of the strikers. The latter's position was made extremely precarious by the chronic surplus of labor in a year of severe depression and unemployment. Officials of the Great Western Sugar Co. stated to the Associated Press that there were two or three men available for every job vacated.²⁶ Falling prices and substantial monetary losses stiffened the resistance of growers and company officials to union demands.

Public agencies and law authorities were generally hostile to the strikers. County commissioners in Weld and other beet-growing counties stated publicly that relief would be denied to workers who refused jobs in the beet fields.²⁶ Newspapers announced that Red Cross flour donations to the needy would not be available for those who declined to

²⁴Rocky Mountain News, May 16, 1932 (p. 1).

²⁵Idem, May 16, 1932 (p. 1).

²⁶Idem, May 17, 1932 (p. 5).

work.²⁸ Material aid provided by the Workers International Relief of New York City was an inadequate substitute, as was legal aid supplied by the International Labor Defense for strikers arrested en masse. Police and sheriffs in several counties in north and south Colorado within 2 weeks arrested dozens of pickets on charges of "vagrancy," "intimidation," or simply "attempting to persuade workers to leave their jobs in the beet fields."²⁹ Deportation of a number of the more militant Mexican members of the United Front contributed to the final collapse of the movement.³⁰

The strike was relatively free from extralegal violence and vigilantism. Nevertheless, there were sufficient individual cases to represent "terrorism" and "intimidation" to the union representatives.³⁰ Opposition threatened to become violent after a company-employed "ditch-rider" was injured by an explosion, which newspapers attributed to a bomb set by "beet labor agitators."³¹ In one locality violent armed conflict on a large scale was narrowly averted. The Rocky Mountain News in its May 27, 1932, issue reported that—

Squads of heavily armed deputy sheriffs and volunteers surrounded and arrested 33 alleged strike agitators in the sugar-beet fields near Avondale yesterday. Farmers of the district, armed and organized, were prepared to use their guns against the asserted agitators when the officers reached the scene, averting violence. None of the demonstrators were armed * * * .

The United Front Committee disappeared after the failure of this strike. Groups of the more militant organizers continued their unionizing campaign on a local basis. Some worked through organizations which survived the strike, and others organized new groups where previous unions had disappeared. The Spanish-Speaking Workers' League, for instance, was organized among the more radical beet workers living in Denver during off-season months. It was a means for holding them together after the 1932 strike collapsed. For the next few years the beet workers' organizations strove primarily to obtain adequate relief rather than to raise wage rates in the beet fields.

Unemployed Organizations in Colorado

Under-employment, poverty, and dependency had created a serious labor problem in beet-growing areas of Colorado and other Mountain States for many years. High seasonality and low wage rates in sugar-beet work, together with lack of alternative job opportunities for Mexican field laborers, had been causes for grave concern even in the most prosperous years of the late twenties.

Labor organizers in many agricultural areas during the thirties were anxious to unionize farm workers in order to protect their position as relief clients rather than as wage earners. Relief was a club which could be used to support or destroy the bargaining power and security of laborers on their jobs. Competition for jobs in the fields decreased and wage rates were kept from going lower when part of the labor supply could be maintained on relief.

²⁸Longmont Times Call, June 17, 1932 (p. 1).

²⁹Rocky Mountain News, May 18, 1932 (p. 3); May 19, 1932 (p. 2); May 20, 1932 (p. 10); May 21, 1932 (p. 12); May 27, 1932 (p. 3).

³⁰Rural Worker, Vol. 1, No. 3, October 1935 (p. 2).

³¹Rocky Mountain News, May 23, 1932 (p. 3).

The incentives which impelled beet workers to organize and press for adequate relief provisions were doubly strong in Colorado. Public assistance was of crucial importance as a supplementary source of livelihood³² and appeared to be administered in an unusually discriminatory manner by public authorities.

Testimony from both labor representatives and government officials indicated that earnings from cash and work relief were almost as high as, if not higher than, wages from beet-field work. Beet laborers consequently sought to stay on relief where possible.³³ Local and State relief administrators at the same time were often under the domination of the most influential groups in the community and acted in the interests of growers and sugar-company officials. The influence of employers was particularly strong in these areas, because the labor belonged to a depressed racial minority. Beet workers throughout the early and middle thirties complained that they were being cut off relief rolls arbitrarily. Sometimes they were discharged well before the growing season began; this created a surplus of labor which depressed wages.³⁴ Little or no attempt was made in the earlier years to guarantee that workers could find jobs when cut off relief. They had to compete with out-of-State migrants, many of whom were recruited by the sugar-beet companies.³⁵ Spokesmen for Roman Catholic welfare organizations, among others, complained that the burden of charity was being shifted increasingly to private or semipublic agencies in Denver and other cities.³⁶

Discrimination was made still more apparent after 1933, when beet growers began receiving crop benefit payments from the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. While wages and prices in other industries were rising during 1933 and 1934, beet workers' wages remained but slightly above the record low of 1932. According to a survey by the Agricultural Experiment Station of the Colorado State College of Agriculture, average contract-labor rates in the northern beet-growing section were \$13.42 per acre in 1933 and \$13.19 in 1934, as compared with \$12.09 in 1932, \$18.09 in 1931, and \$24.68 in 1930.³⁷ Meanwhile the incomes of the five major sugar companies during the 4 years 1933 to 1936, inclusive, as the survey pointed out, were "very favorable."³⁸

Particularly irritating to Mexican and Spanish-American workers was the discrimination against them as a racial or cultural minority. State WPA Administrator Paul Schriver later admitted with regard to relief policy—

We are not particularly proud of the way in which it was handled. Men were laid off on the assumption that they were beet laborers because of their names—

³²In various surveys the proportion of beet workers' families on relief varied in time and place from 37 to 97 percent—the latter in the Arkansas Valley of southern Colorado during 1935. A study of 192 beet workers' families on relief in Weld County during 1936 revealed an average income from relief nearly as large as that from beet work—\$172 and \$222, respectively, for the year. The average amount of public assistance received was 39 percent of the total average annual income from all sources. (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Serial No. R. 703, pp. 16-17; Olaf Larsen: Beet Workers on Relief, Research Bulletin No. 4, Colorado State Agricultural Experiment Station, Fort Collins, May 1937.)

³³Regional Sugar Beet Labor Conference, Denver, March 19-20, 1937. Works Progress Administration (pp. 1, 38, 50).

³⁴Longmont Times Call, June 27, 1934, September 18, 1934, June 21, 1935, March 5, 1937; Colorado Labor Advocate (Denver), April 5, 1935; Denver Post, June 22, 1934, April 27, 1936; Rocky Mountain News, May 5, 1937.

³⁵Regional Sugar Beet Labor Conference, Denver, March 19-20, 1937. Works Progress Administration (pp. 15, 25, 33, 34).

³⁶Catholic Register, March 30, 1936, January 21, 1940.

³⁷R. T. Burdick: Economics of Sugar Beet Production. Experiment Station, Colorado State College, Fort Collins, Bulletin 453, June 1939 (p. 36).

³⁸Idem (p. 41); see also J. F. Rasmussen, op. cit.

Spanish or Mexican. We were faced with the necessity for making reductions, bungled the thing through and got rid of the men whose traditional employment was in the beet fields. (Regional Sugar Beet Labor Conference, March 19-20, 1937, p. 1.)

Another administrator said:

The WPA, in my estimation, is consequently being represented by the Spanish-speaking people as showing class prejudice in referring to the beet work only Spanish-speaking people. (Regional Sugar Beet Labor Conference, March 19-20, 1937, p. 39.)

The Trade Union Unity League, following the collapse of its beet-labor strike for wage increases, sought to organize "unemployed councils" of beet workers to agitate for more adequate relief. This program merged with that of the Colorado State Federation of Labor, which took a more active interest in the unemployed than did its counterparts in other States.

The executive board of the State federation from 1933 through 1935 carried on a campaign to organize local unemployed councils in various communities and to unite these in the State-wide Colorado Federation of Workers. Free charters were issued to local councils and their representatives were allowed to have a voice in the annual convention of the State federation. They had no vote since they paid no regular dues. Membership cards issued to those who joined the councils were forfeited when members obtained stable jobs which took them out of the category of unemployed. According to a former secretary-treasurer of the State federation, 25,000 membership cards were issued altogether.³⁹

State federation officials made some attempt to handle grievances presented by these organized groups, and to help them formulate and negotiate demands. A few of these councils, as in Greeley and Fort Collins, engaged in strikes for improved conditions on FERA work-relief projects but were unable to win substantial concessions. Some, like the Crowley County Federation of Workers, became local agricultural-labor organizations which later acquired charters from the A.F. of L. as federal labor unions.⁴⁰ Members of some councils in the Arkansas Valley were reported to have participated in a series of small sporadic strikes in the cauliflower, pea, and potato crops during 1934 and 1935. A race riot nearly occurred in one instance in 1935 when a grower-shipper imported a gang of Filipinos to work in field crops.⁴¹

Beet-Labor Unionism and the Jones-Costigan Act of 1934

Federal Government legislation applying to the sugar-beet industry provided a renewed stimulus to the unionization of beet workers. The Jones-Costigan Act of 1934 granted special monetary benefits to beet growers and, uniquely for American agriculture, some measure of protection for field labor. It provided for the establishment of sugar quotas and marketing allotments, for a processing tax on sugar, and for benefit payments to growers making production-adjustment contracts with the

³⁹See Proceedings, Annual Convention of the Colorado State Federation of Labor, June 1934, Official Report (p. 20).

⁴⁰Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 9, April 1936 (p. 2).

⁴¹Field notes taken in interviews.

Government. These benefits were made contingent upon clauses prohibiting employment of child labor and fixing minimum wages. For the year 1934, before the labor provisions were applied, growers received benefit payments estimated to average \$17.15 per acre; a survey by the Children's Bureau of the U. S. Department of Labor showed average family wage earnings of \$16.40 per acre.⁴² Another survey by the Agricultural State Experiment Station in Colorado indicated wage rates averaging \$13.19 per acre.⁴³

To win substantial concessions for beet workers under the terms of this legislation, labor sympathizers felt that it was necessary to exert organized pressure and to be represented by spokesmen at hearings and investigations sponsored by the Department of Agriculture. Labor unionists, particularly in the left-wing group, accordingly campaigned actively during 1934 and 1935 to organize beet workers in sugar-factory districts throughout the Mountain States. Loosely organized committees of beet workers were hastily created in a number of centers such as Denver, Noyot, Longmont, Fort Collins, and Fort Lupton, Colo., Billings, Mont., and Lovell, Wyo. Federations were formed in Boulder and Larimer Counties, Colo., to coordinate the local committees. Locals of the old Beet Workers' Association were revived in such communities as Fort Lupton, Platteville, Rollmer, and Longmont, though by this time the radical or progressive elements had gained dominance.

Other organizations supplemented the beet workers' unions. The Independent League, organized in Fort Collins and Loveland, was a heterogeneous body of unskilled workers in diverse industries. The Joint Labor Committee of Larimer County, centered in Fort Collins, was composed mainly of middle-class sympathizers—merchants, ministers, and other professional men interested in the labor problems of the sugar-beet industry. Members of this group later helped to raise money to charter a local organization of beet workers as a federal labor union of the A.F. of L.⁴⁴ The Spanish-American Protective League of Las Animas was primarily a type of mutual-aid society common to racial or cultural minorities. Groups such as the Arkansas Valley Cooperative Labor Association and the Rocky Mountain Beet Laborers' Association in Brush, Colo., were alleged by left-wing organizers to be company unions. They were organized, it was charged, to be the "labor mouth-pieces" of beet growers and sugar companies at Government hearings.

A new class-conscious or at least job-conscious labor unionism among sugar-beet workers grew from these scattered local groups. It became State-wide and regional, claiming a membership of several thousands, under radical leadership within the A.F. of L., and later the C.I.O.

State-wide Unionism and the A.F. of L.

The old Beet Workers' Association was revived in February 1935, when a small militant group in the vicinity of Fort Lupton, Colo., called a convention of local beet-labor representatives in the Rocky Mountain region. Meeting in Denver, delegates claiming to represent some 35,000

⁴²U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Serial No. R. 703 (p. 2).

⁴³R. T. Burdick: *Economics of Sugar Beet Production* (p. 36).

⁴⁴*Rural Worker*, Vol. 1, No. 11, June 1936 (p. 2).

beet workers in Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, and Montana sought various gains under the terms of the Jones-Costigan Act. A minimum wage of \$23 an acre based on a yield of 12 tons and a bonus of 50 cents for every ton above this was demanded, together with enforcement of child-labor provisions and settlement of unpaid wage claims for the 1934 season. To exert pressure for those demands, an executive committee of seven members was elected, district committees were established in all factory districts, and organizers were dispatched to unionize field workers.⁴⁵

Workers presented their demands and grievances at hearings held by the U. S. Department of Agriculture during March in Pueblo and Denver, Colo., Scottsbluff, Nebr., and Billings, Mont. The result to the organized laborers was disappointing. A minimum contract wage of \$19.50 per acre was set for northern Colorado, and \$17.50 for southern Colorado. This represented, nevertheless, a substantial gain over the previous year's rates of \$13 to \$14. Beet laborers won additional protection when the AAA opened an office in Denver to adjudicate wage disputes for 1934 between workers and growers. Under the Jones-Costigan Act the Secretary of Agriculture could require that all bona-fide wage claims be paid before final benefit payments were made.⁴⁶

The Colorado State Federation of Labor in 1935 again took an active part in organizing the beet workers. It contributed toward the expenses of Mexican and Spanish-American organizers in the new Beet Workers' Association. According to some officials of the State federation, two vice presidents on its pay roll during 1935 and 1936 devoted most of their working hours to the task of organizing beet workers, helping them formulate their demands, and negotiating on their behalf with representatives of sugar companies and growers.

The executive committee of the Beet Workers' Association held another convention in Denver in January 1936, for the purpose of uniting the local unions into one national organization. It was attended by 50 delegates representing 39 local organizations in 5 States (Colorado, Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, and South Dakota). They resolved unanimously to organize federal labor unions in every sugar-beet factory district in the Mountain States. These were to be federated in an international beet workers' union affiliated to the A.F. of L.⁴⁷ The National Committee to Aid Agricultural Workers, represented by John Donovan in this region, also worked in the general campaign.

Discrimination against beet workers on relief also received attention at the convention. A resolution addressed to Harry Hopkins, Federal Administrator of the Works Progress Administration, stated that—

* * * it is common knowledge that relief officials are tied with the beet growers and their associations, and that last summer it was common practice to shut down relief agencies at the request of local farmers, to force workers into the fields at even less than relief rates. (Rural Worker, Vol. 1, No. 7, February 1936, p. 1.)

The organized beet workers' demands were further clarified in a conference called by the Colorado State Federation of Labor in Greeley during 1936. Seventy-five delegates attended, representing unaffiliated bodies and federal labor unions recently chartered by the A.F. of L. in such

⁴⁵Rocky Mountain News, January 27, 1935; Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 3, November 1935 (p. 3).

⁴⁶Denver Post, March 27, 1935.

⁴⁷Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 6, January 1936 (p. 1); Vol. I, No. 7, February 1936 (p. 1).

centers as Longmont, Johnston, Crowley, Fort Lupton, Fort Morgan, Fort Collins, Greeley, Eaton, Rocky Ford, and Gilcrest. A model contract for the 1936 season called for a flat minimum rate of \$23 an acre and a bonus of 75 cents for each ton above 12 per acre. All disputes between growers and laborers were to be settled by collective bargaining and no workers were to suffer discrimination because of union membership.⁴⁸

The conference voted to request William Green, president of the A.F. of L., to authorize a permanent organization to be known as the Colorado Conference of Beet Field and Agricultural Workers' Unions. Pending this authorization, a negotiating committee, which included the vice president of the State Federation of Labor, was created to meet with the Mountain States Beet Growers' Association. John Gross, secretary of the State federation, acted as chairman of the conference as a temporary body, and James Graham, vice president of the State federation, served as secretary.

The central executive of the A.F. of L. authorized the formation of a State organization, and the Colorado Federation of Agricultural Workers Unions was established at a conference of organized beet workers in Greeley during August. The constitution of the new organization provided for the establishment of an executive board and committees for each local to negotiate and administer union policy on a State-wide basis.

Local unions in the new federation represented diverse origins and varying degrees of bargaining power. Some were temporarily very effective. In Fort Lupton, for instance, numerous conflicting local bodies were brought together into the Agricultural Workers Union Local No. 20172. This organization won for bean pickers a closed-field agreement and a 35-percent wage increase from the Kuner and Fort Collins Canning Cos. Union closed-field agreements were also claimed for a time in 95 percent of the sugar-beet fields in the Fort Lupton district.⁴⁹

Local No. 20179 of Crowley began as a group of unemployed who organized to protest discriminatory relief policies. It received a charter from the State federation in 1934 as a local of the Crowley County Federation of Workers and became a full-fledged federal labor union in 1936.⁵⁰

Organizers of Local No. 20169 in Fort Collins raised money for its federal labor union charter by making collections among local merchants and professional men, a number of whom had belonged to the Joint Labor Committee of Larimer County.⁵⁰ This union was active in mobilizing mass protest meetings of beet workers and WPA workers. Its officers claimed to have forced the county welfare committee and the State board of public welfare to abolish soup kitchens and adopt direct relief in this area.⁵¹

Newly organized locals such as No. 20215 in Torrington, Wyo., situated in outlying areas where beet workers had had little previous experience in unions, were weak and short-lived.⁵²

Other organizations composing the State Federation of Agricultural Workers were not trade-unions in the strict sense of the term. The Comision Honorarias Mexicanos was a protective association sponsored by the Mexican consulate. The Workers Alliance organized relief clients

⁴⁸Rural Worker, Vol. 1, No. 9, April 1936 (p. 2); Rocky Mountain News, March 11, 1936 (p. 8).

⁴⁹See V. Vigil, in Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 13, August 1936 (p. 6).

⁵⁰Rural Worker, Vol. 1, No. 9, April 1936 (p. 2).

⁵¹Idem, Vol. II, No. 2, February 1937 (p. 2).

⁵²Idem, Vol. I, No. 11, June 1936 (p. 2).

and unemployed only, but cooperated with the State federation in unionizing beet workers, and acted as spokesman for local communities which had no chartered locals.⁵⁴

A conference was called in February 1937, to prepare demands for the forthcoming season. It was attended by 50 delegates representing 20 agricultural and beet workers' organizations in Colorado, Wyoming, and Nebraska. Of these, 14 were federal labor unions, 3 were locals of the Mexican Honorary Commission, and 3 were unaffiliated local organizations.⁵⁵ The conference drew up a model union contract demanding a basic wage scale of \$25 an acre, with a \$1 bonus for each ton over 12 per acre. It provided further that extra labor be hired and paid for by the grower, and that the sugar companies be responsible for full payment of wages to the workers.⁵⁶ A negotiating committee was elected to meet with the sugar companies and the growers' association. It consisted of the executive board of the Colorado Conference of Beet Field and Agricultural Workers Unions and representatives from each of the factory districts.⁵⁷

The problem of discrimination against Spanish-speaking beet workers on relief was stressed again at the conference and some progress toward eliminating the practice was reported. A resolution condemning discriminatory relief policy was introduced by beet workers' union delegates who had attended the annual convention of the American Federation of Labor in Tampa, Fla., in the fall of 1936. The resolution recommended to Harry Hopkins that "the system of administering work relief be revised to provide for representation of labor unions locally organized on all boards for determining eligibility for public relief."⁵⁸

The bargaining position of beet workers' unions in Colorado was weakened in 1936 when the Supreme Court invalidated the Jones-Costigan Act. Child workers in large numbers again competed with adults when the labor provisions of the act were no longer enforced.⁵⁹

The labor supply was augmented further by the large number of workers discharged from WPA rolls during 1936. According to the Rocky Mountain News of March 10, 1936, these totaled 5,200 for the State, including 1,400 in Denver, 1,200 in Greeley, 1,000 in Colorado Springs, 1,000 in Pueblo, 250 in Grand Junction, and several hundred in other centers. The district WPA director was reported to have furnished lists of relief clients to the sugar companies as a source for recruiting workers. Company officials threatened to import laborers in large numbers from New Mexico and Arizona on the ground that there was an inadequate supply in northern Colorado.⁶⁰

The problem of incoming transients in Colorado, aggravated by the sugar companies' recruiting activities, reached its climax in the spring of 1936. Governor E. C. Johnson on April 18 proclaimed martial law along

⁵⁴Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 4, April 1937 (p. 4).

⁵⁵Idem, Vol. II, No. 3, March 1937 (p. 2); Proceedings of Conference of Beet Field and Agricultural Workers Unions of Colorado and Neighboring States, Denver, February 6, 1937 (pp. 4-6).

⁵⁶Proceedings of Conference, February 6, 1937 (p. 3); Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 3, March 1937 (p. 2).

⁵⁷Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 3, March 1937 (p. 2).

⁵⁸Idem, Vol. II, No. 1, January 1937 (p. 5); Proceedings, op. cit.

The agricultural delegates next traveled to Washington and interviewed Assistant Administrator Aubrey Williams, to demand action to stop intimidation of beet workers. Calling the State administrator in Colorado by long-distance telephone, Mr. Williams reportedly insisted that there be no discrimination against beet workers, and threatened to take authority out of the hands of local county boards if it continued. (Rural Worker, op. cit.)

⁵⁹U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Serial No. R. 703 (p. 3).

⁶⁰Rocky Mountain News, March 13, 1936.

the Colorado-New Mexico border in order to block the entry of transients in search of employment. He charged that—

* * * certain classes of individuals within the State of Colorado are acting in conjunction with large numbers of persons outside of said State who are aliens and indigent persons to effect an invasion of said State. (Denver Post, Apr. 19, 1936, p. 1.)

The officer in command of the National Guard even sent airplanes over the Oklahoma panhandle and northern New Mexico to detect any movement of migrants toward Colorado. The Denver Post reported that—

Word came to General Kimball that labor agents, who are alleged to have contracted to supply cheap alien and other labor for the Northern Colorado beet fields, had gathered a great force of aliens to the south of Baca County. (April 21, 1936, p. 1.)

Simultaneous emigrations of Colorado beet workers to fields in other States raised further complications. Growers claimed that the Governor's blockade was creating a definite labor shortage in the Arkansas Valley and other sugar-beet areas of Colorado. O. E. Griffiths, secretary of the Southern Colorado Beet Growers' Association, was of the opinion that "what we need is the National Guard along the northeastern Colorado border to prevent our beet labor from going to Nebraska." (Rocky Mountain News, April 26, 1936, p. 2.)

A surplus of beet-field workers developed nevertheless. In this period of general prosperity, expanding employment, and rising prices, wage rates in northern Colorado remained at the 1935 level of \$19.50 per acre, while in the Arkansas Valley they fell from \$17.50 per acre to \$16.25.⁶¹

The negotiating committee of the Colorado Federation of Agricultural Workers Unions met several times with representatives of the Mountain States Beet Growers' Association (representing growers in Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and Nebraska) to discuss contract demands for sugar-beet labor. No collective agreements were reached. The growers proposed a minimum scale of \$19.50 an acre with a bonus of 65 cents a ton above the basic 12 tons per acre. Additional payments were to be made in event of increases in the price of sugar under the proposed Federal legislation for acreage reduction and benefit payments. The federation persisted in its proposal for a \$25 flat rate.

The union pressed its demands meanwhile at joint conferences attended by government officials and representatives of beet workers, growers, and refining companies. Organized labor spokesmen won an agreement from the WPA stipulating that beet workers in the future would not be laid off relief work until definite contracts had been drawn up between growers' and workers' representatives beforehand.⁶² Cooperation from the Mexican consulate and important Catholic laymen and clergy in Colorado was enlisted to help restrict the seasonal inflow of Mexican and Spanish-American workers from other States.⁶³

United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America

Beet workers' unions during late 1936 and early 1937 became increasingly interested in affiliation to the C.I.O. Their representatives at

⁶¹U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Serial No. R. 703 (p. 13).

⁶²Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 5, May 1937 (p. 5); Proceedings, Regional Sugar Beet Labor Conference, Works Progress Administration, Denver, March 19 and 20, 1937.

⁶³Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 3, March 1937.

the annual convention of the A.F. of L. at Tampa, Fla., in the fall of 1936 had united with other agricultural labor spokesmen in a bloc which demanded an international charter for farm and allied workers. This they failed to achieve. Farm-labor unionists later charged the A.F. of L. executive with refusing to provide sufficient financial aid and personnel for an adequate organization campaign. The more active farm-labor unionists leaned toward the C.I.O., which promised greater support.

Fourteen active federal labor unions of beet workers, including 13 in Colorado and 1 in Wyoming, surrendered their A.F. of L. charters and joined the new C.I.O. international, the U.C.A.P.A.W.A., when that organization was established at the convention in Denver during July 1937. These locals formed the initial framework of U.C.A.P.A.W.A., District III, having jurisdiction over the States of Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, Nebraska, and Montana. By the end of the following year the district organization claimed 37 chartered locals, including 1 of mushroom workers in Denver and 1 of sheep shearers in Montrose, southwestern Colorado, having a total membership of 10,000 workers.⁶⁴

Unionism among beet workers was stimulated in late 1937 by renewed Federal legislation granting benefits to growers and protection to labor in the sugar-beet industry. The Sugar Act of that year provided for a quota, a processing tax on sugar, and benefits averaging \$19.42 per acre plus crop insurance for growers. These provisions were made conditional upon growers' acceptance of certain standards for child labor and minimum wages. Wage rates were to be set in each beet-growing area at a level "determined by the Secretary [of Agriculture] to be fair and reasonable after investigation and due notice and opportunity for public hearing."⁶⁵

Expanding unionism among beet workers, first under the A.F. of L. and later under the U.C.A.P.A.W.A., had had some effect on wages. After remaining at \$19.50 per acre during 1935 and 1936, contract-labor rates in northern Colorado were raised to \$20.50 in 1937. The Department of Agriculture set a \$22.80 minimum for 1938 after holding public hearings in various beet centers.⁶⁶

Labor Troubles of 1938

J. A. Beasley, president of the newly organized District No. III, U.C.A.P.A.W.A., in the beginning favored a conciliatory policy for his union. In a long press interview he expressed satisfaction with the labor provisions of the new Sugar Act and favored farmer-labor cooperation:

What we hope to do is to convince the growers that their interests and those of labor are naturally allied. We stand ready to take any measures in behalf of the growers which will aid them to free the industry from the domination of the processors and their bankers * * * .

Our only quarrel with some of the present growers' organizations has been that some men who have guided them have been more interested in the welfare of the processing companies than of the growers, and in some cases have been sugar-company stockholders * * * .

⁶⁴President's Report, Proceedings, Second Annual Convention, Denver, January 21, 22, 1939 (p. 2).

⁶⁵U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Serial No. R. 703 (pp. 2, 3).

⁶⁶Idem (p. 13); Denver Post, August 14, 1937 (p. 10), April 13, 1938 (p. 3).

I think the present rates for beet-field labor are about as high as possible under present conditions * * * We regard the 1938 Department of Agriculture wage allocations as fair, and all that could reasonably have been expected. (Rocky Mountain News, November 27, 1937, pp. 1-2.)

Dissatisfaction nevertheless became widespread among the rank and file union membership of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in the Mountain States during 1938. A decreased beet acreage created a temporary labor surplus, which was increased by continued importation of transient workers from other States. Growers discriminated against resident union members. Labor conditions in the beet fields failed to improve despite minimum standards set by the Federal Government.

Seventy-five delegates to the District No. III conference of U.C.A.P.A.W.A. early in 1938 delivered an ultimatum to the Beet Growers' Association. They demanded union control of hiring, substantial pay increases to \$26 per acre in place of the prevailing minimum of \$22.80, and guaranties of better housing for beet workers during the coming work season.⁶⁷ District No. III by this time claimed 47 locals having 9,000 paid-up members and an equal number of "pledges" in Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Utah, Nebraska, and Idaho.⁶⁷ In early spring, while the growers' association was negotiating contracts with the sugar companies, the union sent ballots to some 20,000 beet workers in six Mountain States to vote on the question of empowering the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. office to call a strike for union demands.⁶⁸

The strike was deferred, because the time was far from strategic. Organized growers themselves were disputing with the sugar companies while negotiating contracts. Members of several growers' associations voted to refuse to plant beets until the companies granted certain price concessions. In at least one growing area the contract advanced by the company was accepted only under protest. The local beet growers' association released its members from any obligation to live up to the contract, and informed them that they were free to follow their individual interests as they saw fit.⁶⁹

Beet acreage in Colorado in 1938 was the smallest in decades—120,000 acres, as compared to an average over 10 years of 162,000. Various reasons were advanced, such as inadequate prices from the companies, higher wages set under the Sugar Control Act, and uncertain weather conditions.⁷⁰ The State employment service reported that many farmers had decreased their plantings to the point where they and their families could perform the necessary work without hired labor. U.C.A.P.A.W.A. District President Beasley abandoned the union's demands on the ground that wage rates were "satisfactory."

We regard the 1938 wage allocations as fair and all that could reasonably be expected. Growers, in prices for the 1938 crop, did not get relatively as much. Processors will get the best end of it. (CIO News, Vol. 1, No. 36, August 1938, p. 1.)

The union took direct action during this period only in pea fields in the vicinity of Greeley (Weld County). Early in August, U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Local No. 158 organized the pickers, most of whom were local Mexican beet workers. It formulated demands for union recognition and a wage rate of \$1.25 per hundredweight, in place of the prevailing 20 cents per 30-pound hamper and 5 cents bonus at the end of the

⁶⁷CIO News, Vol. I, No. 8, January 1938 (p. 3); Rocky Mountain News, February 11, 1938 (p. 8).

⁶⁸Denver Post, April 13, 1938 (p. 1).

⁶⁹Delta Daily Independent, April 15, 1938 (p. 1).

⁷⁰Rocky Mountain News, May 21, 1938.

harvest.⁷¹ A large employer refused to negotiate with a committee of union members and fired two of them for organizing activity. About 400 pickers promptly struck on July 8, demanding reinstatement and back pay, union recognition, and wage increases.⁷² Picket lines were established around two large farms, to prevent labor contractors from recruiting new crews. Shortly afterward, Sheriff Gus Anderson arrested 17 strikers on charges of "unlawful assembly, violating State antipicketing law, and obstructing the highways."⁷³

The strike was settled within a few days through the intervention of the regional National Labor Relations Board. That agency assisted semi-officially on the ground that a labor contractor from Idaho had brought in pea pickers from other States. The union won a written agreement granting recognition, back pay, and the union scale for picking.

There were threats of strikes again during the beet harvest in October. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. by this time had dropped its demands for wage increases, and sought greater recognition and control over the hiring of beet workers. Specifically the union demanded agreements granting closed fields and a check-off system of collecting dues, job preference for local and State resident workers, and union responsibility for providing growers with the labor they required.⁷⁴

A State-wide general strike of beet workers threatened when the Mountain States Beet Growers' Association suddenly canceled a conference which had been scheduled with U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Officials of the association claimed that they had no authority to enter into labor agreements for its members.⁷⁵ Governor Ammons of Colorado and representatives of the U. S. Department of Labor met with indignant response from the growers when they attempted to mediate the dispute. H. L. Brooks, leading member of the Windsor local of the association, sent a telegram to the Governor stating:

The farmers of the Windsor sugar factory district vigorously protest your interference in injecting your office into the beet-labor controversy in northern Colorado.

I grow 50 acres of beets and if I am to be dominated by outside influences in my farming operations I will quit the crop. Interference in labor problems of us farmers will not be tolerated. (Greeley Tribune, October 7, 1938, p. 1.)

Ralph Clar, former director of the association protested union demands for the reason that other types of farming would also be dominated; beet workers would not be allowed to do any other type of work, such as potato picking and hay harvesting, except with the permission of the C.I.O. and on terms dictated by it. "It would be turning northern Colorado agriculture over to the C.I.O.," he said.⁷⁶

J. A. Beasley announced that the association's refusal to negotiate had left the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. with "no other recourse but to order a strike."⁷⁷ The Workers Alliance of Colorado pledged full support by seeking relief for strikers and preventing unemployed workers from taking jobs on struck beet fields. The State WPA administrator took a neutral position, announcing that clients would not be laid off in order to take the places vacated by strikers.⁷⁷ County officials, more closely associated

⁷¹Rocky Mountain News, July 13, 1938.

⁷²CIO News, Vol. I, No. 32, July 16, 1938 (p. 1).

⁷³Rocky Mountain News, July 11 and 13, 1938.

⁷⁴Greeley Tribune, October 4, 1938 (p. 1).

⁷⁵Idem, October 6, 1938 (p. 1).

⁷⁶Idem, October 11, 1938 (p. 2).

⁷⁷Idem, October 7, 1938.

"The WPA is not permitted to interfere with established union relationships and as a matter of policy will not lay off or cause to be laid off workers now employed by the WPA in order that such workers may take the jobs previously held by men on strike."

with growers, were less impartial. Charles O. Plumb, Weld County Commissioner, expressed the opinion that the union "would be taking unfair advantage of the growers, and should not be given relief while on strike."⁷⁸

The position of the union was hopelessly weak. Publicity attending the threatened strike, and the fact that topping was the most highly paid operation in beet work, attracted large numbers of laborers from other areas. Migration of white "Dust Bowl" refugees from the Middle West and Southwest was reaching its peak. The Greeley Tribune reported "hundreds of farmers and farm workers flocking into northern Colorado from Kansas, Missouri, and Wyoming, applying for any jobs left open if the C.I.O. calls a strike."⁷⁹ Hundreds of local beet laborers were already available because of the reduced beet acreage. One prominent grower warned union organizers that—

They don't control enough of the beet labor to make a ripple in the harvesting of the crop, and those going on strike and breaking their contract will have a mighty hard time getting a contract to break hereafter. (Greeley Tribune, October 7, 1938.)

The union position became desperate and a complete debacle was only narrowly averted. U.C.A.P.A.W.A. President Donald Henderson and Vice President Leif Dahl rushed out to Colorado to improve the union organization in District III in case a strike became unavoidable. High C.I.O. officials meanwhile put pressure on the U. S. Department of Agriculture and other agencies in Washington, D. C., to seek a compromise from the growers.⁸⁰ Beet workers were requested to defer strike action for several days. Governor Ammons, at the request of the Conciliator from the U. S. Department of Labor, appointed a mediation committee of five members, to seek adjustment of the issues.⁸¹

A settlement of sorts was finally reached which included a "statement of policy" rather than a bona-fide union-employer agreement for the beet industry. The District U.C.A.P.A.W.A. called off the strike at the request of James Patton, member of the Governor's committee and president of the Colorado Farmers Union. The Farmers Union in return agreed to organize beet growers into a group separate from the Mountain States Beet Growers' Association. This new dual organization was to cooperate with the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in securing adequate beet prices for growers and in collective bargaining over wages and working conditions.⁸²

Organized beet growers and local newspapers denounced this move as an act in "collusion" with the C.I.O., to furnish a way out for the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. and "save its face."⁸³ Patton, on the other hand, claimed that the beet growers were being betrayed by their own marketing associations in dealing with both the sugar companies and beet workers' unions. He said:

The fundamental difficulty in the beet-growing areas is not the controversy between the beet growers and the beet-field workers. The real problem is that beet growers have themselves been betrayed and their interests neglected by their organization. (Greeley Tribune, October 14, 1938, p. 1.)

⁷⁸Greeley, Tribune, October 14, 1938 (p. 1).

⁷⁹Idem, October 14, 1938.

⁸⁰CIO News, Vol. I, No. 5, October 15, 1938 (p. 1).

⁸¹Greeley Tribune, October 11, 1938.

⁸²CIO News, Vol. I, No. 46, October 22, 1938 (p. 7).

⁸³Greeley Tribune, October 14, 1938 (p. 6).

Decline of U.C.A.P.A.W.A.

Beet farmers and field workers gained little from the agreement with the Farmers Union, as the latter did not represent a significant proportion of the grower-employers in Colorado. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. declined rapidly in membership in the Mountain States as the feeling spread that the settlement had been a "sell-out." This suspicion became stronger when the incumbent district president, J. A. Beasley, was removed from office on charges of betrayal and bribery, leaving the union heavily in debt.

Retrenchment by the national U.C.A.P.A.W.A. organization also weakened District No. III. The more isolated or outlying locals were allowed to lapse because of the high cost of maintaining them, and the organization was restricted to locals within easy access to district headquarters. The only ones remaining by 1940 were two in Fort Morgan and one each in Denver, Fort Lupton, La Salle, and Longmont. These were in the most intensive beet-raising area in the country, a region sufficiently compact to maintain for a time the contacts and services from headquarters. Early in 1941 District No. III was abandoned entirely by the national U.C.A.P.A.W.A. executive, and the international's representative, Clyde Johnson, was transferred to San Antonio, Tex.

The union modified its policy after 1938. It regulated strikes more strictly by requiring their authorization from the district office beforehand. U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Local No. 6 of Fort Lupton, without resorting to strikes, won an agreement with bean-picking contractors granting union recognition, job preference, and a substantial increase in wage rates.⁸⁴ The agricultural strikes that did occur after 1938 were spontaneous or unauthorized. Two hundred migrant pea pickers in the vicinity of La Jara and Bountiful, south-central Colorado, participated in an unsuccessful spontaneous walk-out for 2 days during late August 1939. The current picking rate in the area was 20 cents per 30-pound hamper. A labor contractor imported the 200 pickers and their families from Idaho to harvest 1,100 acres of peas at 15 cents per hamper. When the migrants struck for the 20-cent rate, their places were taken by local workers whom they had previously displaced.

U.C.A.P.A.W.A. District No. III in the Mountain States had to assume increasingly the character of a semipolitical pressure group, as the only effective protection for beet labor rested with government agencies. The union acted as spokesman for beet workers at wage hearings held by the Department of Agriculture, as well as at conferences called by State and Federal relief agencies and employment services. U.C.A.P.A.W.A. locals took on the functions of the Workers Alliance in many localities in seeking to protect the rights of beet workers on relief. Beet-labor unions acted in concert with their allies to seek the election of county commissioners, sheriffs, and other law-enforcement officials who would be sympathetic to organized workers.

In the last analysis the chief reason for the ineffectiveness of unions in collective bargaining was the large and growing influx of transient labor from other States. This reached its greatest proportions during the threatened strike of 1938, and caused alarm in government as well as labor circles. Faced with growing competition from unorganized workers of other States, the unions were helpless to improve their position through

⁸⁴U.C.A.P.A.W.A. News, Vol. I, No. 9, July-August 1940 (p. 14).

direct action. They had to rely on legislative action to gain any measure of security for their members.

The problem of seasonal migration into Colorado had become even more critical after Governor Johnson's attempted blockade in 1936. Hearings of the Colorado Industrial Commission during 1937 had unearthed much evidence regarding employment of child labor, depressed living conditions, and continued recruitment of workers from other States. The Rocky Mountain News for May 8, 1937, stated:

Although the beet growers and the laborers both agreed that there was ample labor available, it was admitted by representatives of the Great Western Sugar Co. that labor was being recruited from out of the State and that transportation was being furnished.

Governor Ammons called a special conference of sugar-company officials, relief administrators, and State employment officers to deal with the problem. The attorney general meanwhile investigated labor-recruiting handbills carrying the name of the Great Western Sugar Co., alleged to be distributed along the West Coast and throughout New Mexico.⁸⁵

After a conference of representatives of State relief and employment service agencies, labor unions, and employers, State officials announced a drive to restrict employment of out-of-State labor in the Colorado beet fields during 1938.⁸⁶ It was reported, nevertheless, that 2,000 beet laborers entered Colorado during a single 2-week period and that their transportation had been paid by the sugar-refining companies. Employment on emergency relief projects at the same time was reported to be at the highest spring level in 3 years.⁸⁷ The beet companies continued to justify their policy on the ground that there was a labor shortage in Colorado because resident relief clients would not or could not do beet work.⁸⁸

The Governor finally called a conference early in April 1939 for representatives of labor, growers, sugar companies, and government officials. Growers and sugar-company officials promised to hire local workers released from WPA, when these were found willing and able, and agreed not to advertise or recruit labor from other States. The president of the Southern Colorado Beet Growers Association, however, warned the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. that—

If it should happen that labor cannot see fit to accept the wages fixed [by the Department of Agriculture] we shall have to go outside of Colorado and get labor. (Denver Post, April 5, 1939, p. 4.)

U.C.A.P.A.W.A. spokesmen for the beet workers agreed to abide by the prevailing wage and accept employment at that figure. Labor conditions in the beet fields did not grow materially better during 1939 despite these promises for improvement. The union's declining influence was reflected in an average decrease of 4 percent in beet wages below the 1938 level. Contract-labor rates for 1939 approximately equaled those of 1937.⁸⁹ In its Statement to the Sugar Beet Wage Hearings in Denver, January 19, 1940 (pp. 1, 4-5), U.C.A.P.A.W.A. District No. III announced that—

⁸⁵Rocky Mountain News, April 30, 1937; May 14, 1938.

⁸⁶Idem, May 14, 1938.

⁸⁷Idem, May 21, 1938.

⁸⁸The Colorado (Denver), April 8, 1939.

⁸⁹Denver Post, March 31, 1939 (p. 26).

The 1939 season was a very unpleasant one for sugar-beet workers. Grower-labor contracts were violated at will * * * violations of the law and discrimination against workers indicate very serious labor conditions that point to laxity in administering the law and the need for closer examination of conditions by the Department of Agriculture.

The union charged that many members, because of their C.I.O. affiliations, were refused contracts in the factory districts in which they resided. They were forced consequently to migrate to other States for beet work. Sugar companies, in spite of their pledges to Governor Carr the previous year, were reported as having continued to import more than 1,000 workers to replace resident beet labor. Many beet workers had had hoeing and topping jobs taken away from them in spite of written or verbal contracts and thus in violation of the law. Extra labor was hired for topping in order to shorten the harvest period, and the income of workers under contract was correspondingly reduced. Many beet laborers were forced to work on share contracts which, unlike those applying to tenants, did not allow the worker to share in benefit payments to the grower. Finally, it was charged, labor continued to receive inadequate protection from county committees, the only enforcement agencies to which they could appeal, because these were composed almost entirely of grower-employers.⁹⁰

⁹⁰Statement to the Sugar Beet Wage Hearings, Denver, January 10, 1940 (pp. 1-5).

CHAPTER XVI.—Unionism in the Southwest: Texas and Oklahoma

Displacement and Agrarian Agitation

It is perhaps inaccurate to call rural unionism a farm labor *movement* in an area as large and diversified as Texas and Oklahoma. The organized agitation that developed periodically among tenants and laborers in these two States during the past 6 decades or more was usually local, infrequent, and scattered. It tended to express the aspirations of farm operators rather than of wage laborers, since in most areas of the Southwest the former constituted the majority of the rural population. The interests of farm workers were not thought to be different from those of the operators, since it was the accepted belief that the workers' future lay in rising to the position of proprietor. Cotton and other cash crop areas of the region usually were characterized by having more white farm operators, a smaller proportion of sharecroppers and day laborers, larger family acreage allotments, and higher standards of living than were true of plantation areas of the older South.

The conditions which gave rise to agrarian movements in the Southwest, however, were not fundamentally different from those which stimulated unionism and unrest among casual workers in California or among plantation sharecroppers and day laborers in eastern Arkansas and Alabama. The California pattern of large specialized farms which hire large groups of seasonal laborers for intermittent employment has been spreading to many family farming areas of Texas and Oklahoma, as well as to the plantation lands of the Old South. A growing burden of indebtedness and a rising rate of tenancy have been characteristic among farm operators in the Southwest. These trends were climaxed in many sections by mass displacement through mechanization and catastrophic climatic factors such as drought. In many areas the total number of farm operators declined. Individual holdings were consolidated into larger tracts cultivated by power-farming methods, and hiring a greater proportion of seasonal workers than before. The capital investment required for successful farming increased. Displaced small operators either remained, to exist upon casual employment supplemented by public relief, or migrated to other areas in search of other jobs or other farms to rent.

Agrarian agitation in the Southwest was a byproduct largely of the farm operators' decline. As indebtedness, tenancy, and displacement increased among them, their economic and social position came to parallel that of casual laborers and sharecroppers in other regions. The line between owner, tenant, and laborer in many cases became extremely fluid at a depressed income level. On a few occasions all three groups participated jointly in movements to protect common interests and to promote common objectives. Several such organizations expressed a radical philosophy and adopted tactics and policies ordinarily associated with labor unions. For these reasons, some associations of tenants and laborers in Texas and Oklahoma, as well as in States of the Old South, may be considered as much a part of farm-labor unionism as were the organizations composed exclusively of wage workers.

The most important radical agrarian movements in the Southern States began among the relatively independent cotton farmers of the Southwest, who were free from the frustrations of strong racial divisions and caste relationships which the plantation system imposed. In other Southern States agrarian organizations drew their largest following among small hill farmers of the Piedmont sections, who were motivated by latent opposition to large planters and their allied business interests.

The earlier movements were primarily associations of farm proprietors rather than laborers. Outstanding among these were the Farmers Alliance, the Farmers Educational and Cooperative Union, and the Farm Labor Union, all of which originated in Texas.¹ The Farm Labor Union was the most radical and, more than the others, represented the attitudes of the poorer tenants and laborers. The preamble to its constitution stressed the unity of interest between farmers and workers who "have been slaves for years of the manufacturers, the gamblers, and the speculators of every type."²

Agrarian organizations among the poorer class of tenants, sharecroppers and laborers in eastern Oklahoma during the early twentieth century, as will be described later, more nearly approached the status of true farm-labor unions.

Class-conscious unionism among agricultural wage workers as a separate occupational group did not develop in the Southwest until the thirties. It was confined largely to Texas, where casual and migratory seasonal labor had become a vital and distinct element in the agricultural economy. In Oklahoma and other Southern States agricultural wage workers continued to be organized with poorer tenants and sharecroppers, because these groups were not sufficiently different in status and economic interest to make separate unions feasible.

Beginnings of Labor Organization in Texas

*The Cowboy Strike of 1883*³

One of the first agricultural industries of the United States to be dominated by large-scale operators was cattle ranching in the Southwest. The cattle baron developed at the expense of the small ranch proprietor and depended largely upon hired labor to perform the essential ranch work. The increasing concentration in ownership and control was accompanied by much friction. The first large strike of hired laborers in the general field of agriculture occurred among some 325 cowboys in western Texas during the early eighties, when fencing the range was rapidly driving small cattlemen out of business. The labor condition which provoked this outbreak was a precursor of similar situations in other

¹R. L. Hunt: *A History of Farmer Movements in the Southwest*. Texas A & M College (College Station, Tex.), 1925.

²Quoted from R. E. Anderson: *History of the Farm Labor Union of Texas*, M. A. Thesis, University of Texas (Austin), 1938.

³The discussion of this incident is based upon Dr. Ruth Allen's Chapters in the *History of Organized Labor in Texas*, Bureau of Research in the Social Sciences, University of Texas (Austin, University of Texas Publications, No. 4141, Nov. 15, 1941, pp. 33-41).

fields of agriculture in the Southwest which were to create unrest in later years.

The cowboy in American folklore has long been a romantic, almost legendary, figure who typified the individualism and opportunity of the frontier. He was considered a special variant of the year-round hired man. He felt a personal loyalty to "the Old Man" and had before him constantly the goal of becoming an independent cattle raiser. Reality, of course, differed sharply from this idealized picture. Of all forms of agriculture during the latter part of the nineteenth century, cattle ranching probably exhibited least the attributes of the "agricultural ladder," much less of family farming. Labor relations on the cattle ranch resembled those of an industrial enterprise rather than a farm, and the group attitudes which developed were likewise similar. Most cattle ranches employed cowboys in gangs or crews under the supervision of ranch foremen or riding bosses. They were laborers hired to do special seasonal jobs during the round-up and odd ranch jobs during other months of the year. Dr. Ruth Allen of the University of Texas points out that—

Whatever else the cowboy may or may not have been, he was a hired hand, a laborer who worked for wages. He was a casual laborer with all that term implies—no settled habitation, no family, no security of status or income. It has not been fully appreciated that the most dramatic, the most direct action in the American labor movement took place in the mines and on the railroads of the West among workers who had ridden the range and followed the cattle trails.

The rapid increase in population and growth of cities in the United States during the latter part of the nineteenth century furnished a steadily increasing demand for meat. At the same time, expanding railroad facilities, and new, improved methods for packing, preserving, and shipping placed distant markets within reach of stock raisers. The price of range cattle rose considerably during the seventies and eighties. High profits attracted large investments and stimulated a rapid expansion of cattle ranching in the relatively unpopulated western sections of the Southwest and Middle West, and the prevalence of absentee ownership increased. The heavy capital requirements and complex financial dealings involved in raising livestock for distant markets, as in growing and shipping fruits and vegetables in later years, tended to eliminate the small owner. Most of the expansion was undertaken by large financial interests—railroad companies which had acquired the land as a State subsidy, and foreign or domestic corporations having shares listed in eastern financial markets. The New York & Texas Land Co. Limited and the Franklin Land & Cattle Co., for instance, each owned millions of acres of grazing land. A growing volume of bonds and debentures of cattle companies was sold in England and Scotland as well as in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. By the early eighties the Texas Panhandle was almost entirely owned or controlled by large Scotch and English cattle corporations. The strike of 1883 occurred mainly on ranches owned by enterprises of this type.

Concentration of ownership and control of cattle ranching in the hands of large absentee corporations created friction. The long struggle of small-herd owners against the encroachments of cattle barons and large land companies is a saga of the Old West. The land companies' policy of fencing off large ranges as private property destroyed the independence of many cattle ranchers, created class divisions, and fostered an antagonism

which often flared into open conflict. Many small-herd owners could survive only if they were hired seasonally as cowboys on the larger ranches, could graze their cattle there, and join in the annual spring round-up.

The interests of cowboys as hired wage laborers were, then, not distinctly differentiated from those of small-herd owners, and both participated in the strike of 1883. Tom Harris, the recognized strike leader, was reported at the time to have "enough cattle of his own that he doesn't have to work for wages." The interests of the small owners were expressed in a demand during the strike that they "be allowed to own and run our range cattle on the premises." (Allen, p. 38.)

The specific demands of the cowboys who were hired as straight wage laborers covered wage rates and living conditions. Poor food in particular was a cause for complaint. The strike began in the spring of 1883 when cowboys in the Canadian River country near the town of Tascosa met and prepared an ultimatum to present to their employers, stating that they had agreed among themselves not to work for less than \$50 per month for "hands" and \$75 per month for those running an outfit, and requiring in addition that cooks be paid the same wage as cowboys. The movement spread rapidly and soon involved some 325 cowboys employed on 7 ranches, including the LS, the LX, the Altaz, the T-Anchor, the XIT, and the Lit outfits.

The effectiveness of the strike was due partly to the fact that the cowboys had been saving their money for some time and could live on the "stake." Moreover, they quit work just before the spring round-up, when the vulnerability of the employers gave the laborers a great bargaining advantage. Apparently not all of the demands were met, however, as some trouble continued between the contending groups. The strike ended finally when the strikers had spent their money and were forced to return to work. The end was hastened by the death of Tom Harris, the leader, and by the decisive action of the employers in calling upon the Texas Rangers to protect their interests.

Wages were raised from \$1.18 to \$1.68 per day, the strikers were paid for lost time, and the number of workers was not changed by the strike. Hours of work, which were not included in the demands, remained unchanged at 105 per week. The employers' loss was estimated at \$3,835.

This cowboy strike was in essence a group protest against conditions of a kind which later gave rise to labor troubles in other fields of agriculture. It was not low wages or intolerable working conditions per se which provoked unrest. Rather it was the growing division of interest and the impersonal relationships which developed between employers and employees as the scale of operations in cattle ranching became larger.⁴ Dr. Ruth Allen concludes:

They [cowboys] rather than the miners whose struggles have filled pages of labor history, were the legitimate precursors of the western labor movement. The cowboy, due to the nature of his work, became more completely cognizant of the

⁴The statement of Sheriff East of Oldham County as to the cause of the strike was illuminating:

"You see, the cow business is not what it used to be. You take such as John Chisum or Charley Goodnight, they were real people. They got right out with the boys on the trail, did just as much work as the boys, ate the same kind of food. Their cowboys would have died in the saddle rather than have complained. See what we have now; a bunch of organized companies. Some of them are foreign and have costly managers and bookkeepers who live on and drink the best stuff money can buy and call their help cow servants. And they expect them to work for \$30 per month and expect them to work as much as from 12 to 18 hours a day on common rations." (Allen, pp. 37-38.)

growing disparity in attitudes and wealth between his employer and himself. If the cowboy's day had not already ended, because his industry was passing away beneath him, it would probably have been the hired cattle hands rather than the miners and the lumberjacks whose resentment echoed menacingly through the history of the West. (Allen, p. 41.)

The Mexican Protective Association

As farms throughout large sections of Texas during the twentieth century specialized increasingly in cash crops, landowners came to depend upon a growing supply of cheap seasonal labor. Cotton especially required large numbers of workers during the brief periods of chopping and picking. These were recruited chiefly from Texas-born Mexicans, supplemented by a huge volume of immigrants coming from Mexico into Texas on a scale far surpassing that in Arizona and California. Landowners in some sections of northeastern and south-central Texas followed the plantation system of maintaining a year-round supply of seasonal labor by means of sharecropping and share-renting agreements with Mexicans, Negroes, and whites. An increasing number, however, hired migratory and casual day laborers. Native and foreign-born Mexican migrants as early as the nineties were following the cotton harvest on foot into eastern Texas for 5 months of the year. They journeyed sometimes as far as the Sabine River before returning to their homes in Mexico or south Texas.⁵ By 1910 they were traveling as family groups by train and horse-drawn vehicle and were covering a much larger cotton-growing area in their seasonal migrations.

The circumstances under which most Mexicans immigrated to Texas made them particularly subject to exploitation by labor contractors and recruiting agents. According to the farm placement division of the Texas State Employment Service, there were more illegal than legal entries up to the 1920's. These proved a "lever of advantage" to the agents, who "could and often did keep the fact of illegality * * * dangling over the heads of the frightened peon workers, paying them meager wages and treating them almost as slaves."⁶

Mexicans on the land had a social and economic status similar to that of Negroes in other sections of the South. They were a large, lowly paid racial minority, and most of them were disfranchised by the State poll tax. As laborers or tenants their bargaining position was much weaker than that of the landlords or employers. Numerous complaints were voiced at hearings held by the U. S. Commission on Industrial Relations in 1915. Contracts between landlords and tenants or sharecroppers were said to be unenforceable in practice or before the law. Mexican as well as white and Negro tenants were burdened with heavy indebtedness, high rates of interest on credit, and high prices for the necessaries they purchased. Not infrequently, it was charged, situations of peonage developed

⁵Paul S. Taylor: *An American-Mexican Frontier*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1934 (p. 102).

⁶J. H. Bond: *Employment Problems of Migratory Farm Workers*, in *Hearings before the Select Committee to Investigate the Interstate Migration of Destitute Citizens*, House of Representatives, 76th Cong., 3d Sess. (hereafter called the Tolan Committee), Part 5, Oklahoma City Hearings, pp. 1799-1832; also, *Origins and Problems of Texas Migratory Farm Labor*, Brief prepared by the Farm Placement Service Division of the Texas State Employment Service, Austin, 1940 (p. 17).

A special type of labor agent developed—a "curbstone operator" or "man-catcher" whose practice was to gather groups of workers—Mexican, white, and Negro—for "selling" and "re-selling" to farmers. (Brief, p. 18.)

in which debtors were forced under armed guard to work out their obligations.⁷

Under conditions like these, any collective action by laborers or tenants was checked almost as completely as on plantations in the Old South. Protest against unsatisfactory working conditions was individual and passive; the rate of labor turn-over was high. Strikes were few, sporadic, and local. The superintendent of a farm enterprise owned by a corporation described one small walk-out of Mexican farm workers thus:

Last fall a bunch of Mexicans, 15 or 20 receiving 60 cents a hundred for picking cotton, asked for 75 cents; said if we didn't pay them they would go where they could get it, and my man told them to go, and they went. (Final Report and Testimony, Commission on Industrial Relations, p. 9258.)

The first union to be organized among low-income Mexicans in agriculture was the Mexican Protective Association, established in southern Texas during 1911. It was an amorphous organization made up of small-farm owners, tenants, and day laborers. Like the precursors of Mexican labor unions in California and Colorado, it was primarily an immigrant brotherhood or mutual-aid society designed, in the words of its secretary, to "come out for the members in case of abuse—murders, lynchings, loss of crops, or violations of law."⁸ It also provided sick and death benefits and assisted in providing relief to distressed Mexicans, both members and nonmembers.⁸

The association's membership fluctuated widely between 1911 and 1914 because of large influxes of Mexicans from across the border. It was weakened in 1914 by depressed conditions in the cotton market and consequently low earnings of tenants and laborers. It was disrupted also by internecine strife between the moderate or conservative group in control and a left-wing faction which was influenced, directly or indirectly, by the Industrial Workers of the World.⁹

Early Farm-Tenant and Labor Unions in Oklahoma

Though the largest radical agrarian movements among small-farm operators began in Texas, they reached their fullest development in Oklahoma. As the last frontier where free land was available, this State attracted large numbers of disaffected rural and industrial laborers who leaned towards radical political philosophies and collective action for economic objectives. The extreme mobility of Oklahoma's population also contributed to the growth of the movement. The proportion of its residents who had come from other States was the largest in the Nation, and the turn-over of its tenants and laborers was particularly high.¹⁰

The rural as well as the urban population was less bound by concepts of tradition and status which hindered the growth of organized opposition

⁷Final Report and Testimony. Commission on Industrial Relations, established by the act of August 23, 1912, Washington, D. C., 1915, Vol. X (pp. 9201-9204).

⁸Idem (p. 9200).

⁹Idem (p. 9201).

¹⁰The U. S. Census of Agriculture figures for 1935 indicated a relatively high rate of mobility of farm tenants in Oklahoma: 42.9 percent of Oklahoma's tenants had lived for less than 1 year on the farms they were occupying, as compared with a national average of 34.2 percent and an average for the southern Cotton Belt of 40.2 percent. In Oklahoma 21.9 per cent of the tenants had lived 5 years or longer on their present farms, compared with 28.6 percent for the country at large and 24.2 percent for the Cotton Belt. (O. D. Duncan: Theory and Consequences of Mobility of Farm Population, Oklahoma A & M College, Stillwater, Circular No. 88, May 1940, pp. 12-13.)

movements among poorer farm groups in other sections of the South. Moreover, Oklahoma, of all States in the South, was least torn by racial divisions.¹¹ Farmer and labor movements in Oklahoma were unimpeded by the Negro problem of States farther east, and were not disrupted by racial divisions between whites and Mexicans as in Texas.

Agrarian movements in Oklahoma resembled labor unions rather than associations of independent farmers. Prevalent tenancy and displacement put a large part of the rural population in an extremely precarious marginal position between farm operator and propertyless casual laborer. Organizations such as the Farmers Alliance, the Farmers Union, and the Farm Labor Union appealed to the more substantial small farmers, i.e., those who owned or could borrow the money required to finance cooperative ventures. They could do little for small owners of submarginal land, sharecroppers, propertyless tenants, and laborers, whose need for organized bargaining strength was perhaps greatest.

Miscellaneous Organizations, 1909-14

Several local and short-lived but nevertheless militant organizations developed among the poorer farm tenants and laborers in Oklahoma during the immediate prewar decade. Some professed the class-conscious philosophy of a full-fledged industrial labor movement. The Renters Union of Oklahoma, organized in McLain County during September 1909, expressed a strong Socialist sentiment in the preamble to its constitution:

The financial emancipation of the working class can only be accomplished when the means of life have passed into the hands of the workers. This great good can be accomplished only through a united class-conscious organization of workers.¹²

The union in actual policy was concerned primarily with the interests of tenant proprietors. It sought particularly to win improved landlord-tenant contracts and to establish "agricultural arbitration courts" which could protect tenants having weak bargaining power.¹³ A similar organization was started in Waco, Tex., in 1911; in November 1913, the two merged and assumed the name of the Land League.¹⁴

A somewhat similar organization, the Farmers Protective Association, was organized in Oklahoma during the immediate prewar years. By 1914 it claimed some 9,000 members, 95 percent of whom were reported to be tenants. It stated that its purpose was to resist usurious charges by banks in particular, and to improve farm conditions in general.¹⁵ Various Socialist organizations were also active among tenants, small farmers, and laborers during 1911 and 1912.¹⁶ The Socialist Party had gained an appreciable following in the eastern section of Oklahoma where cotton was the chief crop and the problem of an impoverished tenantry most serious. In

¹¹O. D. Duncan: *Population Trends in Oklahoma*, Oklahoma A & M College, Stillwater, Bulletin No. 224, March 1935 (p. 10).

The population in the 1939 census was 98.6 percent American and 87.5 percent native white.

¹²Labor History of Oklahoma, WPA Federal Writers Project, Oklahoma City, 1939 (p. 39).

¹³Final Report and Testimony, Commission on Industrial Relations, Vol. IX (p. 9064).

¹⁴Idem (p. 9130).

¹⁵Idem (p. 9095).

¹⁶Idem (pp. 9102-9119).

1911 it was reported to have won one-third of the votes in Seminole, Pontotoc, Pottawatomie, Hughes, and Pittsburg Counties.¹⁷

Most unions of farm tenants and laborers of Oklahoma had disappeared entirely or become inactive by 1915. Some minor acts of violence were reported to have been committed by members on the property of landlords and employers, but there is little or no evidence to show that such acts were the result of deliberate or official union policies.¹⁷

*The Working Class Union and the "Green Corn Rebellion"*¹⁸

The most sensational of all early farm tenant and labor demonstrations in the Southwest was the brief armed revolt of some 2,000 tenants, small farmers and laborers in eastern Oklahoma in the incident known as the "Green Corn Rebellion." The influence of radical labor unionism and the philosophy of direct action, as exemplified in the I.W.W., was apparent in this outbreak.

The idealistic doctrines of the Socialist Party and the ineffective program of the Renters Union and its prototypes had failed to improve conditions appreciably among the impoverished tenants and laborers of eastern Oklahoma. A few I.W.W. organizers meanwhile had been active around the lumber camps and mines of western Arkansas and south-eastern Oklahoma. During the early years of World War I their doctrine of direct action had taken hold among some of the poorer workers in the rural population. This doctrine found expression by late 1914 in a militant secret organization known as the Working Class Union. Though first organized among industrial workers in the vicinities of Fort Smith and Van Buren, Ark., its main following was recruited from farm laborers and tenants in eastern Oklahoma. The W.C.U., according to its organizers, at one time had close to 25,000 adherents in this region.

The union advocated a program of revolutionary action to attain such ends as abolition of rent, interest, and profit taking; Government ownership of public utilities; and free schools and textbooks. It was reported that the W.C.U. led what was probably the first union-organized strike of agricultural laborers in the Southwest. It was reported in one source:

(Fort Smith, May 2, 1916.) Farm hands employed at Moffatt, Okla., and vicinity, opposite Fort Smith, Ark., went on strike Monday because their employers refused to increase their wages from \$1 to \$1.25 a day. The number of strikers cannot be learned, but it is understood that the movement has affected many. Several farmers and planters from the Moffatt region who were in Fort Smith Monday declared that their employees were not in sympathy with the strike, but refused to work for fear of being dealt with violently.

Some planters assert that the Working Class Union, which has a large following among the farm laborers in many parts of Oklahoma, particularly in Sequoia County, is behind the strike. (Quoted from E. L. Nourse: *Agricultural Economics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1916, p. 860.)

The Working Class Union lost many members in eastern Oklahoma as the war progressed and prosperity brought improvement in conditions for farm tenants and laborers. The promulgation of the National Draft Act in 1917, however, caused renewed unrest and indirectly revived the union. The draft was unpopular among poorer farm groups in the section.

¹⁷Labor History of Oklahoma (p. 40).

¹⁸Most of the material in this section is based upon the Labor History of Oklahoma by the Federal Writers Project, cited in previous pages. For fuller discussion see Appendix M (p. 442).

who were just emerging from years of poverty. It provided the W.C.U. with an opportunity for successful agitation under the militant leadership of an I.W.W. organizer from Chicago.

Violence followed the arrest of several men for resisting the draft during June 1917. Arms and dynamite were obtained by the union, and waterworks and bridges were blown up. Further arrests of union members brought organized armed resistance from an "army" of some 2,000 farmers, including Negroes and Seminole Indians.

The "rebellion" was suppressed by August, after county sheriffs had formed large posses of citizens to crush the demonstrations. More than 450 participants were arrested, of whom 193 were charged with draft resistance and 8 leaders with seditious conspiracy; the rest were freed or paroled. Eighty-six were finally convicted by the Federal Courts.

Oklahoma in the Thirties: Displacement, Migration, and Unionism

Unionism among farm operators as well as industrial laborers expanded rapidly in Oklahoma during the comparatively prosperous decade of the twenties. The Farmers Educational and Cooperative Union was revived and reorganized, multiplying several times in membership and establishing many cooperative projects throughout the State. Tenancy among farm operators meanwhile continued to increase.

The problem of displacement and migration in Oklahoma was more widely publicized than that of any other State in the union during the 1930's. Hitherto the most persistent rural question in the Southwest had been the growing indebtedness and tenancy among farm operators, and this trend had furnished the chief "protest motive" for numerous agrarian movements. The chief problem in the thirties became that of propertyless rural migrants whose numbers were swelled by displacement arising mainly from adverse climatic factors and accelerated technological change.

Mass displacement in the Southwest did not give rise to militant labor and tenant unionism or widespread strikes as it had in other regions. Farm tenants and sharecroppers in the western Cotton Belt, in contrast to plantation areas in States to the east, were independent individuals with social standing nearly equal to neighboring owners or landlords, rather than closely supervised dependent gangs who were sharply differentiated in race and status from their landlord-managers. Their reactions when they were displaced were correspondingly individualistic; separate families migrated to cities or other farm areas, individuals competed for jobs or for farms to rent, and their personal relations with landlords grew strained. Strikes and organized roadside demonstrations of the kind staged by the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America among sharecroppers in Arkansas and southeastern Missouri¹⁹ would be difficult to conceive in Texas and Oklahoma.

Agrarian organization in the two States differed sharply in character during the thirties. In Texas, as will be described later in this chapter, there were scattered local unions of habitual migratory workers, most of whom were Mexican. In Oklahoma low-income farm laborers and

¹⁹See Chapter XVII.

tenants became well organized throughout the State in associations which were political pressure groups as well as economic bargaining units. They were able to press for legislative measures which would improve the position of low-income farm groups, or would at least prevent it from becoming more serious.

The Veterans of Industry of America

The unprecedented rate of displacement of farm families gave rise to organizations whose purpose was to protect the dispossessed. In the early years of depression, agrarian workers, including farm owners and tenants, swelled the ranks of urban unemployed who had drifted into Oklahoma in search of jobs in the oil industry, which was experiencing a temporary boom. By 1933 the number of unemployed had risen to 301,310 or 42 percent of all workers in the State.²⁰

Organizations of unemployed whose primary objective was to secure adequate relief from State and Federal Government agencies were the only labor unions that gained in membership for several years. Unemployed councils organized by the Communist Party among both urban and rural workers by 1933 numbered about 80 locals and 30,000 members in the State, with 23 locals and 7,000 members in Oklahoma City alone.²⁰ These were soon disrupted by the arrest and conviction of their most active leaders, after violent demonstrations and clashes with police. The rank and file aligned itself with other groups.

The most important organization was the Veterans of Industry of America or V.I.A., established in 1932 by Ira Finley, a former president of the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor. Its aims for adequate relief were much the same as those of the unemployed councils, but it rapidly branched out to other fields. Local committees of the V.I.A. multiplied while the NRA was in effect, as they were an excellent means for helping to enforce the labor and industry codes. In 1935 the V.I.A. initiated an old-age pension plan which, its sponsors claimed, was defeated in the State Supreme Court, largely through the efforts of the Chamber of Commerce. As an organization whose membership was chiefly rural, it cooperated with the Farmers Union of Oklahoma in seeking enactment of such measures as the Graduated Land Tax and the Homestead Exemption Law.

The V.I.A. remained an effective pressure group for the propertyless. By the end of the thirties it claimed 317 locals (about half of which were active) having approximately 40,000 paid-up members and 200,000 signed membership pledges. Several thousand Negroes were organized in separate locals.²¹ About half of all the members were unemployed, and the rest were tenants and nonunion casual workers in agriculture and industry. In the western cotton and wheat counties they were mostly urban or small-town laborers, while in the eastern section the majority were casual laborers and small part-time farm owners or tenants, many of whom depended upon WPA jobs and intermittent farm work.

The V.I.A. cooperated closely with other farm organizations and labor unions. It organized boycotts and provided pickets to prevent the unemployed and unorganized from breaking strikes of A.F. of L. and C.I.O. unions of oil workers, packing-house and cannery employees, and the like.

²⁰Labor History of Oklahoma, WPA Federal Writers Project (p. 66).

²¹On January 22, 1938, the Black Dispatch, Negro newspaper published in Oklahoma City, estimated that some 20,000 Negroes belonged to the V.I.A.

V.I.A. unions of farm wage workers were limited for the most part to small areas of eastern Oklahoma where many seasonal laborers were employed. The biggest membership was in such counties as Le Flore, Sequoia, and Seminole, where large numbers were hired for seasonal jobs such as cotton chopping and picking during fall and winter, turkey picking in early December, and spinach cutting in spring and fall. A few large plantations growing cotton, spinach, beans, and other commercial vegetables are concentrated along the Arkansas border. Negroes constituted 90 to 95 percent of the laborers recruited from Muskogee and other large cities and towns for seasonal bean picking, spinach cutting and thinning. Of the local casual laborers recruited from relief clients, unemployed, and part-time farm owners or tenants, about half were white and half colored. A number of plantations relied for their regular labor supply upon Negro sharecroppers and casual day laborers who lived on the plantation the year round. These were supplemented during the peak harvest season by white and colored casual workers from adjacent areas.²² The V.I.A. attempted to improve the labor situation in eastern Oklahoma by means of organized labor boycotts, i.e., by persuading workers to avoid agricultural jobs at substandard wages or working conditions. It also exerted pressure upon State relief and WPA authorities to refrain from closing down projects to force clients into agricultural work at low wages.

The V.I.A. for a time faced competition from the Workers Alliance. The major objectives of both organizations were almost identical; both wanted larger expenditures for work relief and union mediation of grievances between workers and work-relief authorities. The Workers Alliance failed to become effective in Oklahoma. By 1939 its officers claimed only 25 locals with an aggregate membership of approximately 2,000. The organization soon disappeared from the State.²³

Workingmen's Union of the World

A short-lived organization named the Workingmen's Union of the World, having much the same function as the V.I.A., sprang up among farm tenants, workers, and unemployed of western Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma during the middle thirties. The leading organizers were former members of miners' and small farmers' unions in the Fort Smith industrial area and the adjacent rural region. The name of the organization was reminiscent of the old Working Class Union, which had developed in the same locale, and its philosophy represented an admixture of hill-country religion and the doctrines of the I.W.W. Its constitution stated:

²²Data obtained from the district office of the Oklahoma State Employment Service, Muskogee, Okla.

²³Labor History of Oklahoma (p. 68).

Ira Finley, president of the V.I.A., charged the Workers Alliance in Oklahoma with being a Communist-front organization formed for the purpose of disrupting and destroying his union. (Labor's Voice, Official Organ of the V.I.A., Oklahoma City, Vol. VI, No. 6, June 18, 1940.) Twenty paid organizers were sent into Oklahoma by the national executive of the Workers Alliance, he claimed, and these centered their activities in the counties where the V.I.A. had its chief membership. The Alliance in Oklahoma was destroyed subsequently. Several alleged Communist leaders were arrested and sentenced to long prison terms on charges of violating the State Criminal Syndicalism Act.

Labor, being the foundation of world progress, knows no State, National or International lines. We have no religion, creed or dogma, save that of the Carpenter of Nazareth, as expressed in the New Commandment, "That ye love one another." We make no distinction as to race, color or nationality. We welcome within our organization all unorganized workers, skilled or unskilled, both wage earners and farmers. (The Toiler, Official Organ of Workingmen's Union of the World, Fort Smith, Ark., Vol. 1, No. 1, February 2, 1934, p. 4.)

The union originated during the NRA period of 1933 and 1934 among unemployed workers on CWA projects in the vicinity of Fort Smith. It spread to other industries whose workers were unorganized by the A.F. of L., or whose unions had become inactive. It claimed at its peak about 116 locals and 30,000 paid-up members in counties adjacent to Fort Smith in both Oklahoma and Arkansas. More than half were agricultural workers and tenants employed in the cotton and spinach plantations of eastern Oklahoma.²⁴ Negro and white plantation workers were reported 100 percent unionized in the northern section of Le Flore County, mostly in the potato-growing area around Spiro, Webber Falls, and Fort Gibson, and well organized in the cotton-growing sections between Fort Smith and Spiro, in the corn and cotton fields from Spiro west to Muskogee, and in the spinach-raising area of Sequoia County on the north side of the Arkansas River. Some of the locals were exclusively Negro, some exclusively white, and some had both whites and Negroes, depending upon the wishes of the membership.

No strikes were undertaken by the W.U.W. directly. The completeness of unionization among workers in the areas indicated was sufficient to raise their wages appreciably. Organized laborers in several localities were reported to have won \$1.25 per day and perquisites in place of a previous flat rate of 60 to 75 cents per day in potato digging and spinach cutting, and \$1 to \$1.25 per hundredweight instead of the prevailing 75 cents for cotton picking.²⁵

The only agricultural strike in which the W.U.W. was involved even indirectly was a small dispute on a few plantations in Logan County, Ark. An independently organized local union of tenants and sharecroppers clashed with planters over the sharing of AAA benefit payments. Though the local union did not affiliate with the W.U.W., the latter supported the strikers with material aid and helped them reach a compromise settlement.²⁶

The W.U.W. soon declined in eastern Oklahoma, and its membership and local organizations were absorbed by the Veterans of Industry of America. The W.U.W. in Arkansas was made up largely of miners and other industrial workers. It later affiliated with the United Mine Workers, and furnished the base for establishing the State C.I.O. Industrial Union Council. In the absence of the Workers Alliance or V.I.A. in western

²⁴By October 1934, the union listed one or more locals in the following communities: In Arkansas—Fort Smith, Van Buren, Jenny Lind, Greenwood, Bonanza, Clarksville, Witcherville, Midland, Hartford, Pine Grove, Mansfield, Tyro, Huntington, Shilow Pine Log. In Oklahoma—Spiro, Race Track, Fort Coffee, Lone Star, Murrays Spur, Stoney Point, Poteau, Heavener, Howe, Pocola, Victor, Hodgens, Independence, Cherry Grove, Kennedy, Wister, Royal Oak, Richards, New Bokoshe, Old Bokoshe, Rock Island, Red Oak, Salona, Pine Valley, Lone Pine, Calhoun, Bengal, Norris, Lodi, Cedars, Boggy, Latham, Jaw Creek, Shady Point, Cartersville, Arkola. (The Toiler, October 1934.)

²⁵Interview, J. W. Eakin, former president of W.U.W., Fort Smith, Ark., December 7, 1940.
²⁶Idem. Several W.U.W. organizers claimed that when they were organizing the union, they found literally dozens of small independent local unions of tenants and casual workers in scattered communities throughout western Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma. Most of these merged with the W.U.W., but a few, like the one of white plantation tenants in Logan County, Ark., remained independent.

Arkansas, the C.I.O. continued the policy of organizing WPA and other relief workers. Intermittently it organized plantation workers along the Arkansas River, who, in contrast to those in eastern Oklahoma, were predominantly white.

One strike of white casual workers took place in river-bottom plantations about 10 miles north of Paris, Ark., a local center of U.M.W. strength. An amorphous local union named the Industrial Workers of America had developed as an offshoot of the W.U.W. and had later affiliated to the C.I.O. Jim Kindrick of Fort Smith, State I.W.A. organizer and later president of the State Industrial Union Council (C.I.O.) organized about 240 casual laborers into I.W.A. Local No. 16 of Paris. Organizers made overtures to river-bottom cotton planters to negotiate for wage increases to \$1.50 per day for cotton chopping in place of the prevailing \$1. A strike was called on May 9 when the farmers refused to meet with union representatives.²⁷

The strike continued for 10 days, during which time local newspapers reported that it was being "conducted in a quiet, orderly manner." No picket lines were formed. The only incident of violence or near violence was the arrest of Orlando Hixson, prominent local planter, on a charge of "assault with intent to kill." Cyrus Grady and Dewey Mosley, members of the union strike committee, claimed that Hixson had shot at them with a pistol and Winchester, and one shot was alleged to have passed through Grady's cap bill.²⁷ The charges apparently were later dropped.

The Southern Tenant Farmers Union

The Southern Tenant Farmers Union, which began among sharecroppers in the Arkansas Delta, made little headway in western Arkansas, Oklahoma, or Texas because the disadvantages of the plantation system were not a major issue in the Southwest. The structure of farm operations in this region, as pointed out in previous pages, did not generally emphasize sharp class lines or provoke organized group conflict. Sharecroppers, tenants, and farm laborers of Oklahoma were already well organized in the Farmers Union and V.I.A., which enjoyed a good measure of public recognition and brought substantial benefits to lower-income farm groups. They could win some measure of security through effective use of their voting rights because they were not disfranchised by a State poll tax, as in Arkansas and other Southern States. Tenants and sharecroppers functioning through the Farmers Union and the V.I.A. could influence or even control local elections and thus insure adequate protection for themselves from law-enforcement officers and Government agricultural agencies. There were few if any inequalities between landlords and tenants or sharecroppers in the distribution of AAA benefit payments. Tenants could always appeal to local committees of their organization, which could take their case to the county agent without fear of violent opposition from organized planters or hostile sheriffs and deputies. The Southern Tenant Farmers Union consequently was led to focus its major attention upon wage laborers rather than tenants or sharecroppers. The first local in Oklahoma was organized at Muskogee in September 1935, with about a dozen charter members. The State organization claimed 50 locals having 1,000 members by January 1936, when it held

²⁷Paris Express, May 11, 1939 (p. 1).

its first convention.²⁸ It formulated demands patterned closely after those expressed by the parent organization in Arkansas, regarding Government rental and parity payments, written contracts with landlords, protection against eviction, and rehabilitation.²⁹

The S.T.F.U.'s limited size in Oklahoma made it ineffective for collective bargaining. A strike of cotton choppers in eastern Arkansas during the spring of 1935 was not extended to Oklahoma. The union campaigned to popularize the demand for a \$1 minimum wage per 10-hour day in the cotton-growing section of the eastern counties and was reported to have won these demands in a few areas without resorting to strikes.³⁰

The State branch of the S.T.F.U. made greater efforts to organize spinach workers in several eastern counties. An agricultural laborers' local union was chartered in Muskogee in January 1936, for the spring season. It aimed primarily to raise wage rates above the prevailing level, which the State organizer charged was an average of \$1.25 for 12 hours' work for a family of five.³¹

The S.T.F.U. temporarily organized only a few hundred out of several thousand workers in the spinach crop. The sole concrete union gain was a closed-field agreement signed with a small grower having 35 acres who paid piece rates of 10 cents per 25-pound basket and provided free transportation to and from work. No progress was reported in negotiations with larger growers controlling most of the remaining 2,200 acres.³²

The union made renewed efforts in the spring of 1937 to organize the 5,000 field, shed, and cannery workers in the spinach and onion strip extending from Muskogee to the Arkansas border. A special field workers' organizing committee of seven members was appointed to conduct the drive, and several open mass meetings were held. This attempt also did not last long, and only a few hundred new members were gained temporarily.³³

The only strike in which the S.T.F.U. participated even indirectly in Oklahoma was conducted by another union. About 135 spinach-cannery workers in Muskogee were organized and chartered as Federal Labor Union No. 20046 in July 1935. They called a strike in August against the Griffen Manufacturing Co. cannery to demand reestablishment of NRA wage scales and rehiring of several discharged union members.³⁴ The Central Labor Council of Muskogee endorsed the strike and promised full support, while the S.T.F.U. supplied pickets and instructed its members in the county not to harvest produce or bring it to the cannery.³⁵ The strike lasted more than a month, during which time numerous scuffles occurred between strikers and strikebreakers recruited from Muskogee County farmers on OERA relief rolls.³⁶ Delay in settlement was caused by the employer's insistence upon retaining a company-union clause in the agreement.³⁷

Perhaps the most important accomplishment of the V.I.A., the W.U.W., the S.T.F.U., and other organizations of tenants, wage workers,

²⁸At a State-wide rally held later at Tallahassee, Okla., in August 1936, the State organizer claimed an attendance of 2,000, though it is doubtful whether all of these were members. (*Rural Worker*, Vol. I, No. 13, September 1936, p. 4.)

²⁹*Labor History of Oklahoma*, WPA Federal Workers Project (p. 78).

³⁰*Idem* (p. 79).

³¹*Rural Worker*, Vol. I, No. 7, February 1936 (p. 2).

³²*Idem*, Vol. I, No. 11, June 1936 (p. 3).

³³*Idem*, Vol. II, No. 3, March 1937 (p. 2), and No. 4, April 1937 (p. 2).

³⁴*Daily Phoenix*, Muskogee, August 7, 1935 (p. 1).

³⁵*Rural Worker*, Vol. I, No. 2, September, 1935 (p. 1).

³⁶*Daily Phoenix*, August 14, 1935 (p. 1); August 19 (p. 1); August 22 (p. 1).

³⁷"It is agreed and understood that the employees' organization to be formed for the purpose of making this agreement shall be open to membership of any and all employees residing in Muskogee and without payment of dues of any kind or character. The company agrees to furnish a suitable hall or other satisfactory meeting place and to pay a reasonable sum for secretarial fees." (*Daily Phoenix*, September 6, 1935, p. 2.)

and unemployed in Oklahoma lay in bringing organized public pressure to bear upon government authorities to deal with the related problems of tenancy, displacement, and labor surpluses in agriculture. The Governor in 1936 appointed a commission to study the question and to make recommendations to the State legislature. In response to the findings, the Oklahoma Legislature in 1937 passed the first Landlord-Tenant Relations Act in the Nation. It provided for equitable rental contracts, an educational campaign among both parties to encourage long-term contracts, regular meetings among landlords and tenants to promote better understanding, and the adoption of means for arbitrating their differences.³⁸ The more serious problems of unemployment, displacement, and labor surplus were mitigated to some degree in the Southwest and other regions during the late thirties by more adequate Federal relief for rural areas.

Texas in the Thirties: Labor Unionism in Agriculture and Allied Industries

Labor relations in Texas agriculture by the 1930's in many ways bore a striking resemblance to those in California, and the similarity grew stronger during this decade. Farms were being mechanized rapidly, small operators were being displaced in great numbers, and land was being consolidated into larger holdings. New cash crops intensively grown for sale in distant markets had been introduced in many areas. A widespread system of factory farming had developed, and it was fully as dependent as that of California upon large and mobile supplies of cheap labor. "Without itinerant labor in great quantities," wrote Robert M. McKinley, State farm placement supervisor of the Texas State Employment Service, "our present agricultural system cannot exist."³⁹ In 1937 he estimated that there were about 600,000 of these itinerant workers in Texas, about half of whom were migratory (i.e., traveling extensively in order to find continuous employment) and the remaining half casual (i.e., traveling only short distances from home to work for varying lengths of time). These latter for the most part either were on relief or were engaged in non-agricultural jobs in private industry, were self-employed, or worked on Government projects.³⁹

Although it surpassed most other States in the number of its agricultural laborers, Texas remained relatively free of unionism and strikes in agriculture and allied industries. It was virtually untouched by the wave of farm-labor outbreaks during 1933. Organized action on the whole continued to be local and infrequent throughout the decade.

The bargaining power of agricultural laborers remained weak and their earnings low for reasons mentioned before. Immigration of Mexicans continued in huge volume during the war and postwar years. The use of private automobiles and trucks increased the mobility of seasonal laborers and made large numbers of them available to growers. By the thirties there was a chronic farm-labor surplus. Mexicans were estimated to constitute 85 percent of the total labor supply; of the remaining 15 percent, two-thirds were white and one-third Negro.⁴⁰ Even after the

³⁸Labor History of Oklahoma (p. 79).

³⁹Robert M. McKinley: Migratory Labor, Austin, Tex., October 1940. Report of Farm Placement Division, Texas State Employment Service (pp. 1, 3).

⁴⁰Idem (p. 5).

worst abuses of the contractor system had been eliminated and the volume of Mexican immigration reduced, the bargaining position of casual farm workers was too weak to prevent their exploitation. They were politically impotent under the poll-tax law (and "white men's primaries" in some counties), they had little or no labor legislation to protect them, and they faced constantly increasing competition from thousands of displaced farm families.

The decentralized structure of the Texas economy was a further obstacle to unionism. As the study of other States has clearly shown, the successful union organization of agricultural workers depends to a large degree upon urban centers which have been unionized previously, particularly where these serve as labor markets or distributing points through which itinerant workers pass in the course of their migrations. Denver (Colo.) and Phoenix (Ariz.), for instance, are State capitals as well as trade centers situated close to agricultural areas requiring great numbers of laborers. Unions with district headquarters in these cities are easily accessible to small towns in commercial-crop areas. In California, San Francisco is within easy access to such major "concentration points" for agricultural labor as Stockton, Salinas, and Sacramento.

The concentration point for the main body of itinerant agricultural workers in Texas, however, is the Lower Rio Grande Valley. This area, rather far from the chief urban centers, is composed of small towns or shipping points which depend upon intensive citrus-fruit and vegetable growing and packing industries. Migratory labor each year spreads out from the valley, following the successive cotton harvests north, east, and west from June to November, and returns south in December. There is no one metropolitan area which could serve as a main center or hub, easily accessible to any large proportion of all agricultural workers. Furthermore, labor unions among nonagricultural trades and industries in the larger cities of the State are themselves relatively weak and undeveloped.

The labor movement in Texas agriculture has therefore been a series of sporadic, independent local developments. The one attempt to coordinate a unionizing campaign over a wide area of the State failed, largely because of the difficulty of maintaining sufficient contact between different areas and of providing adequate services for the local unions.

Catholic Workers Union of Crystal City

The first union of agricultural workers in Texas during the thirties was the short-lived but temporarily successful Catholic Workers Union, formed in November 1930 in Crystal City, center of an important spinach-growing area in the State. It was also one of a very few labor unions in the United States to be organized directly by an official representative of the Roman Catholic Church.

On November 7, 1930, some 450 Mexican workers attended a meeting called by Rev. Charles Taylor, O. M. I., Pastor of the Sacred Heart Church in Crystal City, to discuss methods for dealing with certain labor conditions which were causing widespread hardship and unrest. At the meeting a schedule of demands was drawn up for submission to local growers and processors: That no outside laborers be brought in to work, except under very special circumstances, because of the serious local labor

surplus; that no children under 12 years of age be employed; that hourly or piece rates be established at levels to provide a minimum living wage of \$2 a day, \$11 a week, or \$45 a month; that the wage rates to be paid be announced publicly at each place of employment, and that the wages be paid directly by the employer, so as to eliminate deception and exploitation by contractors; and that any work done be accepted or rejected in the fields rather than at the railroad station, as the latter practice caused considerable loss to the workers. Out of the meeting the Catholic Workers Union, with the Reverend Taylor as president, was formed to "help the laborers in their difficulty according to their rights and obligations, as taught by the Catholic Church." (Circular letter by Rev. Charles Taylor: "To the Growers and Farmers," Crystal City, Tex., November 10, 1930.)

Within a week 25 of the more prominent growers and processing companies in and around Crystal City had signed an agreement incorporating the main demands, though not the minimum living wages stipulated, as above. (Union Bulletin: "Respueta a Los Trabajadores de Crystal City, Tex.," November 14, 1930.) "As a general result," Reverend Taylor wrote about 2 months later, "there have been comparatively few laborers brought in from outside, though many have come in of their own accord. Wages have been maintained here higher than elsewhere in the district. The Mexican schools here report, for the first time in history, an increased instead of diminished attendance since the spinach harvest commenced. And, in general, there has been more than the usual good feeling and cooperation among all classes in the community." (Letter from Rev. Charles Taylor, Crystal City, Tex., February 3, 1931.)

Unionism in the Lower Rio Grande Valley

The first important campaign to organize casual farm workers in Texas on a larger than local scale was an unsuccessful attempt among sheep shearers in several western counties early in 1934, as described in chapter XIV. Union activity among other groups then shifted to the south and east. An official report to the Communist Party by an officer in June 1934, stated:

Our District Organizer in Texas has informed me that near the Mexican border we have an Agricultural Workers Union with 450 members. This Union is directly under the leadership of our Party. (Communist, June 1934, Vol. XIII, No. 6, p. 571.)

A sustained effort was made, from 1934 on, to organize field laborers and packing-shed workers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Any campaign which hoped to unionize farm labor in Texas necessarily centered in this area since it was the main source for migratory labor. It had been found useless to organize casual labor in any one crop area without organizing the migratory workers beforehand, because the seasonal influx

of this group rendered the bargaining power of the casual workers ineffective. Migrants were a strategic group in each locality because their labor was necessary to harvest the crop, and the wage rate had to be set, at the very least, at a level which would attract sufficient numbers from other areas. A union theoretically could affect wage rates in any crop area by restricting the movement or supply of migrants. It was found almost impossible in practice to keep a union of migratory workers intact when regularly each year they scattered over wide regions which sometimes encompassed several States.

Effective organization of seasonal farm labor in Texas, then, necessitated maintaining stable unions in the valley the year round, to which the migrants would return each winter. Such unions required a basic membership of continuously employed resident field labor, as well as the better-paid shed workers whose dues could provide an adequate revenue.

Union organizers found labor in this area, whether in fields or packing sheds, exceedingly difficult to organize or keep organized. Field and shed workers were divided to some degree not only by race but also by occupational interest. The various fruit and vegetable crops in the valley employed only a fraction of all available Mexican workers, so that the majority had to migrate elsewhere for work. Hence few had any direct economic incentive to organize locally.

The farm proprietors in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, furthermore, were primarily small owners, in contrast to many other areas growing cash crops intensively for distant markets. Shipping companies owned or controlled only a small proportion of the irrigated acreage. The farms were relatively small and diversified, and Mexican laborers employed more or less continuously maintained a rather personal "farm hand" relationship with their employers. They usually lived in cabins provided by the owner and often had a plot of ground and some livestock for their families.

Growers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, finally, were in a weak bargaining position as sellers. The prices of their produce were determined on national markets in competition with large-scale grower-shippers from other cash-crop areas. Since farm earnings were low, field workers could scarcely expect to raise their wages by means of collective bargaining.

ONION WORKERS' UNION, LAREDO

A heterogeneous group of Mexican laborers in Laredo (Webb County) in 1933 organized an independent labor union named the *Asociacion de Jornaleros*. Like many new unions at the time, it began as a spontaneous response to the NRA and gave workers the means for enforcing the labor and industrial codes announced by the Washington administration. The *Asociacion* included among its members Mexicans in several occupations—hat makers, painters, carpenters, general construction workers, miners, and agricultural laborers. The union declined rapidly in membership during 1934 because, according to the organizers, local employers hired agents provocateurs to disrupt it.

The *Asociacion* revived temporarily in the spring of 1935, when it assumed control over a strike of some 1,200 onion workers. Certain urban business interests at the time were raising onions as a side line. The crop was grown intensively in a limited area of irrigated farm land near

Laredo, and surplus cheap labor from the city was available for seasonal short jobs. The strike was a spontaneous protest against wages of 60 to 75 cents per 10-hour day, or 6 to 7½ cents per hour. Laborers complained that the work was extremely uncertain. They often drove out to the fields at their own expense only to find that there was but 2 or 3 hours' work for them.

The strike was lost, according to the organizers, because of inexperience among the workers and intimidation from authorities. Strike tactics were similar to those employed in California during the early thirties—mass demonstrations in the city and mass picketing along highways leading to the fields.⁴¹ Union demands were not formulated clearly and attempted to cover too much at once. The demands, printed in strike circulars, were as follows:

- (1) That all work that involved extraction and cleaning of onions, broccoli, carrots, and beets be paid for at the rate of \$1.25 for 10 hours' labor, with overtime at the rate of 20 cents per hour.
- (2) That bunching together be paid at the rate of 2 cents per bunch.
- (3) That carrots be paid a rate of 12 cents for 48 bunches not containing more than 10 pieces.
- (4) That broccoli be paid at a rate of 8 cents for 12 bunches in fields and 5 cents in warehouses.
- (5) That onion harvesting be paid at rate of 5 cents per bushel for first class and those spotted or too small at 8 cents, not to contain more than 22 pounds per bushel.
- (6) That beets be paid a rate of 40 bunches for 10 cents when containing not more than 10 pieces.
- (7) That a rate of 6 cents per crate be paid for Bermuda onions, with crates to be furnished at the place of work.
- (8) That onion grading be paid at 5 cents a sack, complete work, and growers to furnish transportation.
- (9) Drinking water to be furnished near place of work.
- (10) Farmers pay transportation charges of workers to and from jobs.
- (11) Payment of wages by 1 o'clock Saturday, and labor to be immediately brought home in order to be able to purchase their necessities.
- (12) Good treatment of laborers by farm owners and foremen.
- (13) When a group of men are taken out to work on farms and are not satisfied with the conditions or terms, they are to be brought back to town.
- (14) Accidents suffered by the workers are to be paid for by farmers.
- (15) That in all instances where an agreement cannot be reached as to contract wages that the farmers will pay, the laborer is to receive \$1.25 per day.⁴²

Control of union officers over the rank and file was not sufficiently strong to prevent ill-judged actions which subjected the strikers to legal intimidation and suppression. Although there was little violence, 56 arrests nevertheless were made by Texas Rangers sent in at the request of the district judge, who charged that the highways were being blocked by strikers.⁴³

The Laredo strikers refused to sign contracts with individual employers, and held out instead for a uniform agreement covering the entire growing area.⁴⁴ The similarity to some tactics in strikes conducted by Communist unions in other areas led several people, including the district attorney and a resident A.F. of L. organizer, to charge publicly that the movement was controlled by "a few radicals."⁴⁵

⁴¹Laredo Light, April 12 (p. 1) and April 14 (p. 1), 1935; Rural Worker, Vol. 1, No. 1, August 1935 (p. 1).

⁴²Laredo Times, April 12, 1935 (p. 12).

⁴³Idem, April 15, 1935.

⁴⁴H. G. Samuels, a large onion grower employing 100 to 125 workers, early agreed to the wage scales and working conditions demanded by the union. While the strike leaders were willing to accept this offer and sign a contract, the rank and file voted against it for fear of jeopardizing the solidarity of the strike as a whole. (Laredo Light, April 14 and April 15, 1935.)

⁴⁵Laredo Light, April 16, 1935.

John R. Steelman, conciliator from the U. S. Department of Labor, came to Laredo at the request of the Chamber of Commerce. He persuaded some 500 strikers to return to work for two large growers who were willing to pay the union scale of \$1.25 per day. The strike was discontinued after 5 days when an agreement was drawn up at a mass meeting of 600 strikers addressed by Steelman. It amounted to little more than a "statement of policy," since only the two growers mentioned actually signed it.⁴⁶ Steelman expressed the view that "the growers missed a good opportunity to make another strike this season impossible, had they come in and mutually signed the agreement. They left it wide open for another strike." He was strongly critical of the employers and found them "hopelessly at variance among themselves * * * some who say that \$1.25 a day is a fair wage, and others who say that 60 cents a day is too much."⁴⁶

As the agreement was at best only a compromise, the strikers held another mass meeting for the purpose of taking action against employers paying less than the \$1.25 per day promised. The growers repudiated the agreement and, according to leaders of the strike, reverted to the scale of 60 to 75 cents per day as soon as the conciliator left. No further trouble developed, however, and the union lost a large part of its membership because of the unsatisfactory conclusion of the strike.

FEDERAL LABOR UNIONS OF THE A.F. OF L.

A revival of the *Asociacion de Jornaleros* was attempted in the spring of 1936, with aid and encouragement from the National Committee of Agricultural Workers. Mass meetings were held to consider affiliating with the A.F. of L. as a federal labor union, in the hope of winning more outside support. According to a report which union officers submitted to the Civil Liberties Committee, U. S. Senate Committee on Education and Labor, organizers faced a great deal of intimidation. The *Asociacion de Jornaleros*, Laredo, had carried on "exchanges of delegates" with the Farm Workers Union of Mexico and had cooperated with the Communist-controlled unemployed council of San Antonio over the current "relief or work" issue.⁴⁷ Hence the authorities viewed the union with suspicion, as being alien and Communist-dominated. At one union meeting it was reported that the district attorney, the chief of the local immigration department, Texas Rangers, and U. S. Army officers were in attendance. A few days later it was reported that a grand jury had been formed to investigate alleged insults to the American flag at union meetings.⁴⁸ Apparently little came of this investigation.

The *Asociacion* obtained a charter from the A.F. of L. as Agricultural Workers (Federal) Labor Union No. 20212 and immediately initiated a drive to organize similar unions in other agricultural areas of Texas. A State-wide conference held in Corpus Christi during January 1937, was endorsed by the Texas State Federation of Labor and attended by delegates from the Central Trades and Labor Council of Corpus Christi, the Workers Alliance of San Antonio, and locals of the Oil Workers Union, the Brotherhood of Carpenters, and the International Longshoremen's Association. A Texas Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee was

⁴⁶Laredo Light, April 17, 1935.

⁴⁷Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 1, August 1935 (p. 1); No. 3, October 1935 (p. 1).

⁴⁸Idem, Vol. I, No. 11, June 1936 (p. 3).

formed to develop new agricultural labor unions in Corpus Christi, Brownsville, and San Antonio, which were to be affiliated with the A.F. of L. The committee agreed to cooperate with the Workers Alliance in seeking WPA employment at union wages for all unemployed farm workers.⁴⁹ The State organizing committee, with some financial support from local unions of carpenters, plumbers and oil workers, chartered a new local of Mexican tenant farmers as well as farm laborers in the Corpus Christi area.⁴⁹ Organizers were sent to Brownsville, Raymondsville, Robstown, Ingleside, Chapman, Crystal City, and other towns in the Lower Rio Grande area.⁵⁰

Representatives of local organizations of pickers throughout the valley called a meeting prior to the opening of the 1937 cotton-picking season in late June. They agreed to demand a standard rate for picking of \$1 per hundredweight as long as cotton was priced at 12 cents per pound.⁵¹ The Tri-County Vegetable Producers Association met shortly afterward in order to neutralize the union drive; it wanted also to prevent local increases in wage rates which would arise if farmers competed for workers in case of labor scarcity.⁵² The organized growers agreed to set standard rates of 50 cents per hundredweight for first picking, 60 cents for second, and 75 cents for third picking.⁵³

A series of local strikes ensued during late June and early July throughout the cotton-growing area of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, extending from McAllen to Brownsville. The farm workers' unions used the strategy of concerted "stay-aways" or labor boycotts in local areas; pickers avoided the fields which paid less than the union wage rates.

The strike was successful in winning wage increases to \$1 per hundredweight in a few areas, according to union organizers. Some 1,500 cotton pickers and truckers meeting in the town of Mercedes on July 7 agreed to a compromise rate of 85 cents per hundredweight for picking and 20 cents for trucking. Delegates were appointed to negotiate with officials of the Tri-County Vegetable Growers Association for these wage increases.⁵⁴

Local newspapers in most sections, on the other hand, reported that cotton growers were managing to have their cotton harvested at rates as low as 60 cents per hundredweight. Strikebreakers apparently were available in large numbers. In the town of Weslaco, for instance, violence was narrowly averted between local Mexicans and Negro pickers imported from distant Waco. A Mexican labor leader was alleged to have told the Negroes that "a strike was on and they would be shot if they picked cotton." Police dispersed a crowd of strikers.⁵⁵

⁴⁹Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 2, February 1937 (p. 2), and Vol. II, No. 3, March 1937 (p. 2).

⁵⁰Harlingen Star, May 8, 1937.

⁵¹Idem, June 25, 1937.

⁵²On June 17, 1937, for instance, the Harlingen Star reported that farmers in the area were complaining of labor contractor "parasites" and were requesting action to stop alleged "chiseling" by a number of them.

According to growers, many contractors got laborers to agree to allow them to contract with farmers for cotton, with the customary provision that the contractors were to receive a percentage of the wages. The contractors often violated the verbal agreements to provide so many pickers at a certain price when other farmers, with or without knowledge of previous agreements, offered higher prices.

⁵³Harlingen Star, June 10 and 25, 1937.

⁵⁴Brownsville Herald, July 6, 1937; Houston Press, July 8, 1937.

⁵⁵Harlingen Star, July 10, 1937.

THE U.C.A.P.A.W.A.

The Texas Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and its locals were absorbed into the C.I.O.'s United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America in the summer of 1937. The new union conducted an extensive organizing drive in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and other special crop areas in Texas. The locals in Laredo and Corpus Christi were rechartered as branches of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A., and new locals were chartered in several towns in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, such as Weslaco, La Feria, Mercedes, Harlingen, San Benito, and Donna. In McAllen and other towns U.C.A.P.A.W.A. locals enlisted the support of Mexican social clubs and brotherhoods. According to union spokesmen there were altogether some 5,000 paid-up members who, together with their working wives and children, made a significant part of the seasonal labor supply in the valley.

Local unions won a few minor strikes during late summer and fall. A small group of citrus-fruit pickers belonging to a local in Mercedes won a wage increase from 2½ cents to 4 cents per crate when they called a short sit-down strike early in October.⁵⁶

The local unions composed mainly of migratory workers became inactive and disappeared during the last months of 1937. The labor drifted north and scattered in seasonal migrations following the harvests in cotton and other crops. The field laborers' unions were further weakened by the fact that many of the leading organizers and union members were either Mexican citizens⁵⁷ or known Communists. Hence they constantly feared legal suppression and deportation, though such actions were taken against few if any U.C.A.P.A.W.A. members. The union nevertheless faced the deeply imbedded antagonism of Anglo-Saxon groups to alien and radical activities.

SHED WORKERS IN THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY

Sporadic efforts were made to organize the more skilled and better paid packing-shed workers, both whites and Mexicans, in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union Local No. 20363 was organized and chartered by the A.F. of L. in January 1937, and was active for over a year throughout the vegetable-producing areas. At its peak it claimed from 500 to 600 members in good standing, representing all types of shed workers—Mexican and white, migratory and transient. The union did not participate officially in any strike (though scattered "wildcat" walk-outs did take place in some sheds) or win signed contracts with any employers. It did, however, negotiate successfully for a standardization of wages in several sheds employing a large part of the union membership.⁵⁸

The union in February 1938, arranged a 50-car caravan which paraded the length of the Lower Rio Grande Valley in protest against anti-union activity and the prorating of produce shipped to other areas. The latter

⁵⁶Brownsville Herald, October 14, 1937.

⁵⁷Texan-born Mexicans, in the opinion of several unionists, were more difficult to organize than the Mexican-born. The former were brought up in a situation of greater dependency and less freedom of expression, because of their political impotence (imposed by the State poll tax) and their inferior social status.

⁵⁸Brownsville Herald, November 2, 1937.

policy, according to union spokesmen, left 8,000 workers unemployed and threatened to displace 5,000 to 6,000 more.⁵⁹ Local 20363 faced growing competition from surplus nonunion labor, and its membership was found to be too heterogeneous to combine successfully in one union. It became inactive 14 months after it was organized.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in 1937 also attempted to organize shed workers. About 300 skilled crate makers employed by the Jolly Co. in San Benito took steps to affiliate with the C.I.O. Late in August 1937, they went on strike for union recognition, a signed union contract, and certain wage and hour conditions. The company announced its willingness to accede to union demands if they were imposed also upon competing companies in nearby Weslaco and adjoining towns. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. took appropriate steps to this end. Crate Makers Union Local No. 110, Lower Rio Grande Valley, was chartered in the early fall. Representatives from such towns as Mission, Elsa, Pharr, Weslaco, Mercedes, and San Benito held a meeting in the Brownsville City Hall. They formulated standard crate-making rates for competing firms throughout the valley and planned to negotiate union contracts with shippers.⁶⁰ The union campaign failed, however. The strike in San Benito was lost and Local No. 110 rapidly declined.

Local unions of agricultural and allied workers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and other rural areas of Texas, in sum, were virtually impossible to maintain. All had disappeared by the close of 1938. Processing workers in a large urban center constituted the only occupational group related to agriculture which remained with the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. and continued to carry on collective bargaining effectively.

*Pecan Shellers' Unions in San Antonio*⁶¹

The most dramatic labor upheaval in industries allied to agriculture in Texas occurred among pecan shellers. San Antonio, a city fairly accessible to the Mexican border and to intensive agricultural areas employing large numbers of seasonal workers, became during the thirties a concentration point for sweatshops which relied upon large supplies of Mexican labor. Pecan shelling became one of the lowest-paid jobs in the country during this period. The average annual family income was estimated in a survey in 1938 to be \$251 for a family of 4.6 persons, and only 2 percent of the families had incomes of \$900 or more. The average weekly income reported by individuals in pecan work was \$2.73, which was even lower than the \$3.50 per week average income for agricultural labor. Almost a fourth of the pecan shellers' families supplemented their earnings in San Antonio with farm work in Texas and other States during part of each year. Most of these families picked cotton in Texas, and some traveled north to the Michigan beet fields. From all jobs reported by pecan shellers' families in 1938, the average income per worker was \$3.01 for an average week of 51 hours. A large proportion of the shellers depended upon public assistance for part of their livelihood, even when the plants were operating at full speed.

⁵⁹San Angelo Times, February 10, 1938.

⁶⁰Brownsville Herald, October 14, 1937.

⁶¹The material in this section has been drawn mainly from S. C. Menefee and O. C. Cassmore: *The Pecan Shellers of San Antonio*. WPA Division of Social Research, Washington, D. C. (pp. 16-18). It has been supplemented by newspaper reports and interviews.

A militant union was organized among Mexican pecan shellers of San Antonio during the worst years of depression, unemployment, and wage cutting. The Pecan Shelling Workers Union of San Antonio was formed under the close personal domination of Magdaleno Rodriguez early in 1933 and grew rapidly when the NRA came into effect later in the year. Contrary to the usual experience, however, this union of pecan workers subsequently opposed the Federal labor codes. Julius Seligman, largest pecan-shelling operator in the city, later stated that he had provided financial support to Rodriguez in order to promote unionism in competing plants and thus prevent them from cutting piece rates. Rodriguez's union at first campaigned for the NRA wage scale of 10 to 12 cents per pound for shelling. Later it accepted a compromise rate of 5 cents and helped the employer oppose the wage provisions of the NRA. Even this compromise represented a substantial improvement over the 3- to 4-cent rate of early 1933, and the union grew rapidly in membership and status. Rodriguez by late 1934 claimed 10,000 to 12,000 members, though probably less than half of these paid regular dues.

The union was soon disrupted by factionalism and sporadic strikes against repeated wage cuts. Union members opposed to Rodriguez organized a second union and sought to have the labor provisions of the NRA applied to the pecan-shelling industry. This group called itself the Mondolares de Nuez el Nogal (the Tree) and claimed some 2,500 members by late 1934. It was later absorbed into the C.I.O. Pecan Shellers' Union. Another short-lived group known as the Cooperative Nuerceros was organized in 1936 and later, with 250 members, received a charter from the A.F. of L. It failed to survive, partly because the poorly paid membership could not afford, or at least was unwilling to pay, the high union dues required.

The original Pecan Shelling Workers Union meanwhile was becoming more militant. Rodriguez called a strike, in July 1934, in several plants which attempted to maintain the previous season's rate of 2 and 3 cents per pound. The 5- and 6-cent scale was generally adopted under the combined pressure of the union and NRA standards.⁶² The union called another strike, in March 1935, in one shillery which had cut wages from the 5- and 6-cent rates to 4 and 5 cents.⁶³ Strikes spread the following month to several plants which had applied similar wage cuts. Rioting occurred on one occasion early in April, as a result of which Rodriguez and several pickets were arrested and jailed for "unlawful assemblage."⁶⁴ Still another strike developed in June over wage disputes at the Howell-Hutches factory.⁶⁵

These walk-outs failed to prevent a substantial decline in wage standards and union membership during the fall of 1935. Rodriguez's personal instability and dictatorial policies in ruling the union led in time to his imprisonment and finally to confinement in a mental hospital. The remnants of his union were later revived as the Texas Pecan Shelling Workers Union, which increased rapidly in membership during 1937.

Seligman raised the wages of his shellers from 5 to 6 cents per pound in August. The union in October threatened to call a general strike of 5,000 pecan workers in San Antonio unless wage rates were raised to 7 and 8 cents per pound for shelling and 60 cents per hundredweight

⁶²San Antonio Express, July 18, 1934.

⁶³San Antonio News, March 18, 1935.

⁶⁴San Antonio Light, April 8, 1935.

⁶⁵Idem, June 10, 1935.

for cracking. When those plants hitherto paying the 5- and 6-cent rate granted a compromise increase to 6 and 7 cents per pound, the threatened walk-out was averted.⁶⁶

Donald Henderson, president of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A., visited San Antonio in November 1937, to enlist the pecan shellers in his organization. A temporary charter as Local 172 was issued to the Texas Pecan Shelling Workers Union, with the understanding that it was to absorb the former A.F. of L. group, El Nogale, and a new left-wing faction which had risen to prominence through its activities in the Workers Alliance.⁶⁷ This organization rapidly assumed a leading role in the out-breaks which ensued early the following year.

The Southern Pecan Shelling Co.'s contractors on January 31, 1938, announced a 15-percent wage decrease from the 6- and 7-cent rates established in late 1937 to the previous 5 and 6 cents. This provoked a spontaneous strike which conservative union leaders sought to prevent. Left-wing organizers, however, rapidly extended it to a number of other plants, and the chief of police called out squads for riot duty. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. executive then sanctioned the walk-out, making it a recognized strike of an international union.

The scope of the movement and the drastic measures by which law-enforcement officers suppressed it made this strike one of the most highly publicized in the Nation during 1938. According to Mennefee and Cassmore—

On February 7 the police routed 300 pickets from the shelling plants. Over 1,000 pickets were arrested during the strike on charges of "blocking the sidewalks," "disturbing the peace," and "congregating in unlawful assemblies." Tear gas was used on six or eight occasions during the first 2 weeks of the strike, according to the testimony of Chief of Police Owen Kilday at the hearings of the Texas Industrial Commission on February 14; 52 policemen and 125 firemen were used on "riot duty" in the strike. Both Mayor C. K. Quin and Kilday maintained that there was no strike, since they said that only a minority of workers had left the plants. (Mennefee and Cassmore, Pecan Shellers of San Antonio, p. 5.)

Chief of Police Kilday consistently justified attempts to suppress the strike on the ground that it was organized and led by Communists. He said in later testimony: "I did not interfere with a strike! I interfered with a revolution."

Donald Henderson arrived in San Antonio on February 6 to take charge of the strike, and immediately removed local Communists from their position of leadership in the union. This did not mollify the opposition, however, because church and business groups as well as city police charged Henderson himself with being a Communist. Chief Kilday said:

He [Henderson] is an intruder down here that hasn't 600 or 700 followers in the pecan industry. You call it a strike; I call it a disturbance out of Washington, D. C. (Mennefee and Cassmore, p. 7.)

In one press interview Kilday expressed the fear that—

⁶⁶San Antonio Light, October 17, 1937.

⁶⁷The Workers Alliance represented the most militant labor movement in San Antonio. Begun in 1934 by Emma Tennayucca, local Communist leader, it soon had a dues-paying membership of some 3,800. Under the leadership of the Alliance, sit-down strikes were staged at WPA headquarters and in the City Hall to enforce demands for relief and project work, and numerous demonstrations and parades were organized throughout the business area of the city. In July 1937, city police raided the Workers Alliance hall, destroyed records, and jailed several Alliance leaders.

The influence won by Alliance leaders among Mexican unemployed and relief clients rapidly placed them in temporary control of the pecan shellers' strike early in 1938. (See San Antonio—The Cradle of Texas Liberty and Its Coffin, Texas Civil Liberties Union, Austin, 1938, p. 5.)

If he [Henderson] organized these plants with the closed-shop provisions he insists upon, it would place about 18,000 workers under the domination of the Communists * * * .

These workers and their families total in excess of 25,000 people, and would be forced into the local Communist Party before being permitted to work. (San Antonio Light, February 11, 1938.)

Despite the powerful opposition, the number of strikers soon increased to about 6,000, or more than half of the total employed. More than 6,000 applied for membership in the union and about 3,000 of these paid dues during the strike, according to George Lambert, representative of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in San Antonio during 1938. The methods of resisting the strikers provoked widespread protest, and Governor Alldred finally ordered the Industrial Commission of Texas to investigate the situation. In addition to presenting data on living and working conditions in the industry and on the marketing problems it faced, the final report of the commissioners expressed criticism of the way in which operators and police had combated the strike:

We * * * find that there was no evidence introduced before us that would justify police interference prohibiting picketing or the assembling of workers. (Dallas News, February 18, 1938.)

A petition by the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. for an injunction against police interference with peaceful picketing nevertheless was refused.⁶⁸

Governor Alldred finally persuaded the union and Julius Seligman, the principal employer, to arbitrate the dispute. The strikers on March 8 agreed to return to work at the reduced wage which had caused the strike, pending the determining of a fair-wage scale by the arbitration board. A compromise rate was reached at 6½ and 7½ cents per pound. The union negotiated closed-shop contracts with the larger operators at this scale, which was to apply until the Wage and Hour Law came into effect on November 1, 1938.

The union by December had won 13 contracts, covering plants which normally would have employed some 8,000 workers. Included were provisions for a closed shop, a check-off system of collecting union dues, grievance representatives in each shop, and wages of 7 and 8 cents per pound for shellers and 60 cents per hundredweight for crackers. The union in return agreed to cooperate with the employers in attempts to obtain a tariff on foreign nuts, and to begin organizing pecan shellers in all plants in order to establish uniform wages and working conditions throughout the industry. The dues charged by the union, formerly 50 cents a month, were changed to \$1 for those working in the mechanized plants at 25 cents per hour, 40 cents for those working in the hand shelleries at the 7 and 8 cents per pound rates, and 10 cents for the unemployed.

The major difficulty subsequently facing the union was one which could not be settled by negotiation with employers. Only some 2,000 shellers out of an original, 10,000 to 12,000 employed at the peak labor demand under hand shelling could return to work under the new conditions of mechanization which developed after the wages and hours standards were imposed on the industry.

⁶⁸Houston Chronicle, February 19, 1938.

CHAPTER XVII.—Unionism Among Southern Plantation Sharecroppers, Tenants, and Laborers Tenancy and Displacement

The Plantation and Large-Scale Farming

The plantation based on sharecropping and share-tenancy as well as wage labor, has been the southern counterpart of the factory farm in California and other States. Fundamentally, both are large specialized and capitalistic agricultural enterprises which depend upon sizable numbers of seasonal workers for short periods each year to cultivate and harvest intensive cash crops. The lines between farm owners, tenants, sharecroppers, and wage laborers have long been fluid and uncertain in the Southern States. Where land ownership is highly concentrated, the distinctions between various categories of the propertyless become in many respects purely academic. The cotton plantation and the large commercialized farm differ primarily only in their methods of production, of financing necessary capital outlays, and of recruiting, maintaining, and paying their labor. The modern plantation scarcely differs even in these respects.

Cotton agriculture in the South during the last decade in particular has been adopting production techniques and labor relationships that give it more and more the character of California's large-scale farming. This trend, hastened by drastic cyclical and climatic changes, has generated landlord-tenant friction comparable to labor-employer conflict in other regions. The similarity in group relationships on the land in both instances would therefore justify a consideration of sharecroppers' organizations as part of labor unionism in American agriculture.

Sharecroppers and Laborers

Nominally the sharecropper is one kind of tenant whose income is, in part, remuneration for individual enterprise and assumption of risk. Extreme concentration of control and a high degree of supervision in the plantation system of the South in actuality give the sharecropper a status more like that of a farm laborer. Like the Mexican beet worker of Colorado, his work is closely directed by the owner, manager, or "riding boss," and his earnings, his hours of work, and the use to which he puts land, farm stock, and implements are all determined for him by his supervisor.¹ The sharecropping system in the South was a means by which the plantation could make certain of an adequate labor supply at unusually low pay, after the Civil War had freed the slaves. In contrast to most other types of landlords in the United States, the southern planter had to assume almost all financial risk and control over farm

¹Unlike the beet laborer, however, the southern cotton sharecropper in the majority of cases has no written contract to give him definite legal status or protection. The inequality of bargaining power on the cotton plantation is greater because of the predominance of Negroes, who have a lower social status and even less political power and legal protection than the Mexican beet laborers.

operations in order to keep sharecroppers propertyless and dependent, and therefore available at all times for work.

The South has been one region in America in which the concept of the "agricultural ladder" has never been widely accepted. The caste system, because of its clearly defined classes of well-to-do whites, poor whites, and Negroes, has precluded any frequent rising in the social scale. For the same reason, it has hindered the development of unions. Rigid social levels based on tradition and race have long prevented lower-income groups from acting collectively for their own material betterment. Landless farm laborers who organized for higher wages, or farm tenants who organized for written contracts and larger shares, met relentless suppression. This varied in degree from ridicule and social ostracism for promoting "racial equality," to extralegal violence by hooded and unhooded leaders of the community, among whom not infrequently were officers of the law. Laborers and sharecroppers, both white and colored, have been unable to protect themselves through political means. The poll tax in eight Southern States, in addition to school and property taxes and "Jim Crow" laws in many local communities, serve to disfranchise many lower-income groups.

Exploitation of sharecroppers and day laborers has been widespread on southern cotton plantations, because of the one-sided bargaining relations and the workers' lack of protection. Planters have been accused continually of charging croppers and laborers unnecessarily high prices at the plantation commissary, of charging exorbitant rates of interest for their credit, or "furnish," of paying them a lower price for their cotton than is received on the market, of misrepresenting the accounts, short-weighting the croppers on their share of the cotton, and over-estimating their indebtedness.² Not infrequently, through connivance between planters and law-enforcement authorities, sharecroppers appear to have been bound to plantations in a condition of peonage.

Planters and their advocates justified the prevailing modes of exploitation as their only means for survival, since the labor was inefficient and irresponsible, and farm income was on the average low. All these practices had been used so long and so commonly in the plantation system that they were for a long time accepted by both planters and croppers as an integral part of their relationship. Poverty and suppression, moreover, were not conducive to articulate protest or collective action. On the contrary, the enervating effects of long-continued exploitation fostered an apathy which precluded unionism. The older, more exhausted and depressed areas of Georgia, South Carolina, and Mississippi, where the economic and social status of Negro and white sharecroppers was lowest, did not produce the most militant movements. Such movements developed, instead, in the rich plantation areas of the Arkansas Delta and the Black Belt of Alabama, where sudden and drastic changes in the traditional planter-tenant relationship created hardship, unrest, and collective action. The changes were too rapid to allow for gradual adjustment or resignation to the new situation, and group dissatisfaction and discord developed. The attention of sharecroppers was turned to new

²One popular story in this vein is related by Howard Kester as follows:

"A tenant offering five bales of cotton was told, after some owl-eyed figuring, that his cotton exactly balanced his debt. Delighted at the prospect of a profit this year, the tenant reported that he had one more bale, which he hadn't yet brought in. 'Shucks,' shouted the boss, 'why didn't you tell me before? Now I'll have to figure that account all over again to make it come out even!'" (Howard Kester: *Revolt Among the Sharecroppers*, New York, Covici-Friede, 1935, p. 8.)

and unfamiliar issues and injustices, and these in turn made them conscious of older deficiencies in the system which they had accepted as being almost in the nature of things.

Unrest, Mobility, and Conflict

Dissatisfaction and unrest among sharecroppers and day laborers on southern cotton plantations were usually expressed passively and individually. The most prevalent manifestation was a high rate of turn-over or individual mobility common to many unorganized groups. Arthur Raper and others estimated that, before the Federal Government initiated new agricultural policies during the thirties, typical southern tenant families, whether white or Negro, moved almost every 2 years.³ According to some authorities, personal discord between landlord and tenant, which often developed over the distribution of income from crop shares, was a major cause for mobility. Not infrequently such conflict culminated in lynching and other mob action.⁴ Sharecroppers had much less incentive to move during depression periods because of the greater difficulty of finding a "situation."⁵

The increasing contact of the Negro sharecroppers with other social and occupational groups weakened the authority of the planter by lessening the dependency of his tenants. Rural Negroes who migrated in large numbers to industrial areas during the years of World War I made permanent contacts with people in localities having higher living standards and fewer restrictions for the colored race. Improved facilities of transportation and communication increased the mobility of croppers and laborers, and in periods of prosperity their opportunities for employment in other industries furnished an escape.⁶ A planter who was known for his violence or for mistreatment of his tenants sometimes found it difficult to recruit an adequate labor supply. The cropper, noting the prices advertised in newspapers or in stores of nearby towns and cities, became more aware of being short-paid for his cotton and overcharged at the commissary. Enterprising croppers on some occasions even hired attorneys for protection against usury or fraudulent division of crops and Government benefit payments.

Improved transportation and communication also made the plantation more subject to social and legal control from outside, and thus modified the more extreme forms of exploitation and intimidation. Lynching as an extralegal means of social control over Negroes attracted increasingly hostile public attention. By exerting strong pressure on the authorities, organized groups in the South, such as the Southern Women's

³Arthur Raper: *The South's Landless Farmers* (Commission on Inter-Racial Cooperation, Atlanta, Ga., 1937 (p. 7).

⁴Testimony by Prof. T. M. Campbell, Field Agent of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, at Hearings of Tolan Committee, Part II, Montgomery Hearings, August 14-16, 1940 (pp. 440, 441).

⁵R. McClinton: *A Socio-Economic Analysis of a Mississippi Delta Plantation*, Master's Thesis in Sociology, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1938 (p. 26).

It seems to be an unwritten law among the tenants to move when they have an unusually good year, because they are afraid that they will not receive as good treatment the next year and get all of the money that should be coming to them.

⁶In the days before modern transportation, both landlord and tenant were restricted in movement and maintained a relatively close personal relationship of mutual dependence. In his lifetime the sharecropper ordinarily met few people, white or black, other than the families of owners and tenants with whom he worked. At the same time the relative isolation of the plantation gave the landlord, as a law unto himself, greater control over his tenants, by violent means if necessary.

League Against Lynching, during the past decade have reduced the frequency of mob action. Peonage also was more effectively prosecuted by Federal authorities in later years.

These changes had important effects on the Negroes' philosophies of race relations. Booker T. Washington's dictum of humble perseverance and avoidance of aggressive action that would cause racial antagonism has given way to the more militant doctrines of W. E. B. DuBois, as expressed in the policies of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Many southern Negroes, seeing the weaknesses of both positions, turned during the 1930's to the broader programs of labor unionism, and, in a few instances, to revolutionary action. In the opinion of Prof. Guy B. Johnson of the University of North Carolina, these activities were the forerunner of a Negro movement to be characterized by new thought and leadership.

The Scottsboro case, the Angelo Herndon case, the Alabama mine disorders, the sharecropper revolts in Arkansas and Alabama—these, although aided by "outside" white radical influences, are symptoms of the beginning of a new struggle for economic justice, a struggle which comes from the bottom and pushes upward. Eventually the various phases of the movement will strive toward integration, and a leader will be created.⁷

The specific issues which led to organized conflict in the thirties arose suddenly and dramatically. They originated from the unprecedented displacement and migration of cotton tenants, who were uprooted from the land by severe depression conditions, by crop- and acreage-reduction programs sponsored by the Federal Government, and by the widespread adoption of power farming in place of hand labor.

Displacement

CONDITIONS DURING THE DEPRESSION

Certain significant, though seemingly contradictory, changes in the status of southern farm operators took place during the years 1930-35; they indicated a further breaking down of the "agricultural ladder." The number of white and colored farm owners increased, many of whom were urban unemployed returning to the land, but they were concentrated in the poorer and already overpopulated hill farming areas where cheap land was obtainable. At the same time the number of farm laborers and unemployed in the Cotton States increased greatly. Of all operators, the percentage who were tenants declined for the first time since the Civil War.⁸

Several steps may be seen in this major change. Displacement of Negro operators continued, as a long-time trend, but from 1930 through 1935 it was more than offset by an increase in the number of white farmers. The number of white and colored owners and "other tenants" together increased about 10 percent but the number of croppers altogether decreased about 8 percent. This decrease was concentrated in 4 States, roughly 28,600 croppers were displaced in Texas, 20,400 in Georgia,

⁷Guy B. Johnson: *Negro Racial Movements and Leadership in the United States*, in *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XLIII, No. 1 (p. 70).

⁸C. C. Taylor, H. W. Wheeler, and E. L. Kirkpatrick: *Disadvantaged Classes in American Agriculture*, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Social Research Report No. VIII, Washington, 1938 (p. 47).

9,400 in Arkansas, and 7,400 in Oklahoma. Changes in status for farm groups in other States were few and just about offset each other.⁹

Although the total number of farms increased in every State in the country from 1930 through 1935, the number of 20- to 49-acre farms (which would include the typical cropper holdings) decreased in every Cotton State. The increase of "other tenants" was extremely small in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. Another indication of mass displacement or at least of a reduction in employment and income, was the decrease in cotton acreage, from 43 million acres in 1929 to 42 million in 1930, to 38 million in 1931, to 35 million in 1932, and to 29 million acres in 1933.¹⁰ According to Woofter—

Disorganization of agriculture resulted in curtailment of operations by some planters and absolute cessation of planting by others between 1930 and 1932. * * * The result was a displacement of large numbers of croppers' families during these years. Rural youth, no longer able to get employment in urban centers and unable to gain entrance to the agricultural economy of the South, augmented the relief rolls.¹¹

Many of these relief cases were families who continued to live on the landowners' property. As Prof. Harold Hoffsommer pointed out—

Although the conventional attitude of landlords and tenants was that the landlord was expected to "take care" of the tenant when the latter needed aid * * * there was evidence that many landlords were shifting responsibility to the relief agencies.¹²

Relief, however, disturbed the relations between the planter and the croppers. Hoffsommer, in another study,¹³ found that where the croppers were dependent on the planters, about 40 percent of the landlords interviewed indicated that they opposed relief because of its "demoralizing effect." Specifically the planter feared that he would lose his control over the croppers, which was based on their personal dependence on him. The relief allowance would raise their standard of living so that they would refuse to bargain with landlords on the old basis.

The discord between the landlords and the sharecroppers was aggravated by the crop- and acreage-reduction program of the Federal Government's AAA. The hardships which this program imposed on southern tenants and sharecroppers provoked them to organize in self-defense. The secretary of the Sharecroppers Union of Alabama wrote on August 8, 1935:

Wholesale evictions have taken place among sharecroppers and other tenants due to the acreage reduction under the AAA. The more than a million croppers, farm laborers, and other tenants that are landless, homeless, and starving as a result of the reduction program of the AAA are floating from place to place seeking farms to tend or be employed as wage laborers. (Letter from Albert Jackson, Birmingham, Ala., August 8, 1935.)

Literature of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union of Arkansas sounded the same keynote.

The various New Deal measures for agriculture—cotton plow-ups; rentals for nonproduction, subsidies for soil conservation, loans of the

⁹United States Census of Agriculture, 1935, U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Vol. III, General Report (pp. 126, 130, 132).

¹⁰O. E. Baker: A Graphic Summary of the Number, Size and Type of Farm and Value of Products, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Miscellaneous Publication No. 266, October 1937 (pp. 10, 13, 23, 34); World Almanac (Press Publishing Co., New York), 1937 (p. 349).

¹¹T. J. Woofter et al.: Landlord and Tenant on the Cotton Plantation. WPA Division of Social Research, Monograph V, Washington, 1936 (p. 145).

¹²Harold Hoffsommer: Landlord-Tenant Relations and Relief in Alabama (in Monthly Report of Federal Emergency Relief Administration, October 1 to 31, 1935 (p. 1)).

¹³H. Hoffsommer: The AAA and the Sharecropper (in Social Forces, Vol. XIII, May 1935, p. 496).

Federal Land Bank and the Land Bank Commission—saved many plantation owners from bankruptcy. Federal emergency crop loans enabled many small owners and renters to produce crops. However, there was no commensurate service to the sharecroppers, except to those few who benefited from projects of Rural Rehabilitation and later the Farm Security Administration. Relief agencies, including the WPA and the CCC, were of real, though usually temporary, assistance to tenant families. On the whole, however, the AAA and other Federal farm policies merely accelerated the process of displacement which depression conditions had already made serious. For many sharecroppers, particularly the Negroes, the New Deal meant loss of work and income.

Benefit payments for acreage reduction at first were made directly to the planters, who often kept most or all of the money in payment for croppers' debts, real or imaginary. Many tenants and sharecroppers claimed that they never saw their benefit payments, because governmental agencies and private creditors were made joint payees. Provisions which were later written into the contracts, to assure justice to the sharecroppers, were in many cases shrewdly evaded or broken outright.¹⁴ New provisions were then made for paying the tenant directly. Many owners thereupon changed the position of their sharecroppers to that of wage hands (who were not entitled to the benefits) by the simple device of paying them a daily wage at the end of the week rather than advancing them food and clothes beforehand.¹⁵ Woofter points out that some displaced croppers were not actually driven off the plantation but were converted into casual laborers who were allowed to occupy their houses rent-free while they did odd jobs without the benefit of subsistence advances or crop agreements.¹⁶ The hardest hit were the Negroes. White families displaced 70,000 Negro tenants between 1930 and 1935, according to Raper.¹⁷ The dispossessed Negroes commonly became subtenant wage

¹⁴G. W. Blackwell: *The Displaced Tenant Family in North Carolina* (in *Social Forces*, Vol. XI, October 1934, p. 69).

¹⁵The fact that the Government aid to cotton had to be administered through the planter explains its adverse effects on the tenants and sharecroppers. Since the tenants lacked a definite social, economic, and legal status, and suffered the traditional disabilities of the Negro and poor white, the actual execution of Federal programs was by local or county committees chosen by landowners. Those selected were usually the operators of the larger plantations, chosen by the county agricultural agent for their prominence in the community and their sympathy with the AAA program.

In the beginning no regulations strictly required planters to retain their tenants. The Administration felt that such requirements would not be approved by landlords and would thus jeopardize the entire cotton program. According to Professor Hoffsommer, it was hoped that by making rental payments directly to the landlord, because of the traditional paternalism of the plantation he would feel morally bound to keep his usual number of tenants. It was also hoped that public opinion would sanction this principle more than it would if the contracts were made more favorable to the tenants.

¹⁶The amount of actual displacement of sharecroppers and tenants is exceedingly difficult to measure because of the many subtle forms it takes. It is futile to attempt to distinguish between displacement and loss of occupational status or decrease in income. In the first place, several types of laborers are employed in cotton: Those who live on the land the year round, those casuals who are drawn in from neighboring towns and cities, and the migratory workers recruited often from other States. The second type, those workers who are displaced from the farms and who go into nearby towns and return for seasonal labor at the peak seasons of chopping and picking, it is sometimes difficult to classify either as farm laborers or unemployed. The determining variable may be the availability of relief, which is often cut off in the chopping and picking season.

Still more subtle forms of displacement may occur through maintaining the sharecropper technically in his status while obtaining his share of benefit payments and rentals through other charges and thus decreasing his already low annual income. In many Delta areas the old half-and-half sharecropping was changed to a 60:40 division because of the cotton-restriction programs. Later the Federal Government threatened to withhold payments from the landlord where such contracts existed. Many planters reportedly opposed the "Delta contract" on the grounds that it would heighten strife between landowners and tenants and make more effective the agitation carried on by organizations like the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. (*Black Dispatch*, Oklahoma City, May 21, 1938, p. 1.)

¹⁷Arthur Raper: *The South's Landless Farmers* (Commission of Inter-Racial Cooperation, Atlanta, Ga., 1937, p. 15).

hands and casual laborers, the position they occupied in the years immediately following the Civil War.¹⁸

MECHANIZATION OF AGRICULTURE

The trend towards power farming in cotton was an even more dramatic and in the long run more important force than Government crop restriction in displacing tenants and sharecroppers. This development, in the opinion of Arthur Raper, is leading to "the emergence of large-scale mechanized farms in the most fertile areas of the Old South, and a type of peasantry in the hilly sections. Farm laborers working by hand and with one-horse plows on hilly fields cannot compete with power-driven machines on alluvial plains." (The South's Landless Farmers, p. 14.)

Tenant and labor displacement by power farming has been noted by Woolfer, Power, and Cutler and others, and described by Paul S. Taylor. The use of tractors in cotton cultivation began on the outer fringe of the western Cotton Belt and penetrated into several important regions: the dry cotton area of Oklahoma and Texas, which is characterized by large farms, share tenants on thirds and fourths with managerial capacity, and a small proportion of Negroes and croppers; the Black Waxy Prairies of Texas (the outstanding producing section of the western Cotton Belt, with Negroes and white tenants and croppers in large numbers); the Delta region of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas; and the more fertile areas of the Black Belt of Alabama and Georgia, which are characterized by large plantations and a heavy concentration of Negro croppers on small family-acreage allotments.¹⁹

The introduction of the tractor has had many results. The optimum size of farm units increased, and it became more profitable in many cases for owners to take over the acreage of their tenants and operate it themselves. Less labor was needed, except at the peaks of the chopping and picking seasons, because each worker could cultivate a much larger acreage. The difficulty of climbing the "agricultural ladder" was increased by the larger size of farms and heavier cost of capital equipment. Above all, the displacement of tenants and sharecroppers and their conversion into low-paid casual wage laborers were accelerated. Almost all the mechanized plantations in the Delta areas and the western region used day laborers to operate the tractors. Seasonal choppers and pickers employed for a few weeks each year were substituted for tenants and croppers supported the year round.

Displaced tenants migrated to cities to face unemployment and subsistence on relief and to furnish a pool of mobile seasonal labor. Mechanization disrupted the social structure of the plantation, particularly in making more casual and less personal the traditional relationships between landlord and tenant. Friction developed where the customary system of mutual dependence with its accompanying loyalties was destroyed and the urban employer-employee pattern of labor relations was established at a substandard level. The result, according to Taylor, has been—

¹⁸In the Mississippi Delta area, according to a number of observers, planters prefer Negro tenants to whites, and the place of "red necks" in the social stratification seems to be de facto if not de jure below that of the Negro. Thus the poor whites, being rejected by the larger landlords, often had to take inferior places which the Negroes had refused. (R. McClinton: A Socio-Economic Analysis of a Mississippi Delta Plantation, p. 10.)

¹⁹Paul S. Taylor: Power Farming and Labor Displacement in the Cotton Belt. U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Serial No. R. 737.

an industrialized form of agriculture employing wage laborers, some of whom live on the farm, but many, if not most of whom live in the towns. Large-scale mechanized farming, with labor paid by the day or hour; labor swept off the land and into the towns from which it is drawn back only during seasonal peaks; labor which is increasingly mobile and without ties to the land—this pattern is incipient in the Cotton Belt. (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Serial No. R. 737, p. 20.)

Farmers' and Sharecroppers' Unions in Alabama

Alabama has had perhaps the longest and most consistent history of militant agrarian unionism of any State in the southern Cotton Belt. Periodic group conflict was caused by several circumstances.

Alabama is sharply divided into topographically distinct sections, each carrying on different types of farming. About half way down the State lies a broad strip called the Black Belt, running in a general east-west direction just south of Montgomery. It is characterized by large plantations employing chiefly Negro sharecroppers. Several counties in the region have the highest ratios of Negroes to whites in the United States. The Gulf area lying south of the Black Belt is devoted to commercialized farming of special cash crops which are marketed and exported through such centers as Mobile. The third distinct area is the ridge or hill section in the northern half of the State. This is populated mainly by small-farm owners and tenants, many of whom are employed in coal and iron mines and steel plants in the Birmingham industrial area or in sawmills or lumber camps farther west.

Agrarian movements in Alabama represented incipient conflict between regions with contrasting patterns of land ownership, as well as between class or occupational groups within regions. Before the 1930's discord arose most frequently when small-farm owners and tenants of the ridge section protested against the encroachments of Black Belt plantations and urban business or commercial interests. Agrarian conflict in later years followed the attempts of plantation sharecroppers and day laborers to improve their position through organization and collective bargaining.

The militancy of its agrarianism has rested partly on the fact that Alabama has been the most highly industrialized of the southern Cotton States, with aggressive urban unions that have enrolled many rural Negroes and whites. The Birmingham area is a center of basic or heavy industries—mining, smelting, and fabrication of coal and iron and steel products. The requirements for jobs in these industries have tended to select a type of labor most partial to unionism.²⁰ Perhaps more important, the jobs have been accessible to Negroes, many of whom migrated from surrounding farm areas. These workers have imparted to their rural kinsfolk the attitudes of urban labor, and this has conduced to unrest among the poorer farm population.

²⁰In contrast, the important southern textile industry, though periodically experiencing sectional union organizing campaigns, has had no such effect on nearby farm populations. Negroes generally are not employed in the mills except at menial tasks. Textile-mill work—long, monotonous, low paid, and utilizing large numbers of women and children—is not the kind that developed a militant union psychology. The "mill village," furthermore, has been disappearing in the last few years. Mills in small towns recruit their workers in adjacent rural areas from farm families living in their own homes. Often a farmer having grown children working in the mills at \$12 to \$15 per week hires Negroes to replace them at the farm jobs for the traditional plantation wages of 50 or 75 cents to \$1 per day.

This situation in part explains the almost complete absence of rural unionism among Negro and white sharecroppers and day laborers in such States as the Carolinas, Georgia, and Mississippi, where textile manufacture is almost the only urban industry of importance which is accessible to farm populations.

Farm Tenant and Labor Unionism in the Nineteenth Century

Agricultural labor agitation in Alabama and other Southern States began among freed Negroes immediately after the Civil War. They attempted to use their temporary voting privilege and their potential economic bargaining power to improve their material position. Negro labor unions were organized in many centers and sought to obtain agreements guaranteeing certain standard wages and working conditions, security of tenure, and opportunity for land ownership. These they proposed to win through legislation, if possible, and through strikes and demonstrations, if necessary.²¹

This movement was defeated throughout the South by organized planters and dispossessed gentry who regained political power and destroyed the measures designed to protect labor. County associations were formed to protect planters' interests by setting maximum-wage scales and acting as courts of trial to enforce contracts drawn up by their members. Extralegal vigilante organizations, like the White Camelias and the Ku Klux Klan, functioned when economic and political pressure alone was insufficient to ensure absolute control.

The final victory of white supremacy was achieved in 1874, and the initiative in labor and agrarian movements had to come henceforth from whites in northern Alabama who were not under the immediate domination of the large plantation interests. Efforts were made to organize both urban and rural workers and small-farm operators in the Birmingham industrial area and adjacent agricultural sections. Branches of the Agricultural Wheel and the Farmers Alliance in the late eighties attempted to unite across occupational lines and to some degree across racial barriers. The more radical elements among organized farmers joined forces with urban unions affiliated to the Knights of Labor and formed a Union Labor Party. The Alliance in nearby Georgia, ignoring racial divisions, organized Negroes and attempted to protect them from violence and intimidation from white planters.²²

Collapse of these organizations in Alabama and other Southern States followed their decline throughout the country. The Alliance in Alabama suffered much internal strife because it included such diverse groups as Black Belt planters, small hill farmers, industrial union-labor elements, and Negroes.²³

FARMERS UNION OF ALABAMA IN THE 1930'S

During the 1930's a branch of the Farmers Union was organized in Alabama. This organization of small-farm operators, devoted primarily to establishing cooperative enterprises, had risen rapidly and then declined during the early decades of the twentieth century. When it was revived in Alabama during the thirties its character was somewhat changed. Its locals in northern hill counties and in counties in or near the Black Belt

²¹Olive Stone: *Agrarian Conflict in Alabama*, Ph. D. Thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1939 (p. 493).

²²*Idem* (pp. 508, 509, 512).

²³*Idem* (pp. 512, 513).

organized both white and colored laborers and sharecroppers as well as independent farm operators. As a result, in some localities the organizations were more like farm-labor unions than associations of proprietors. Several locals, and to some extent the State organization itself, finally came under the control of left-wing labor organizers.

The Farmers Union developed strongly in counties adjacent to the Birmingham industrial area, among small part-time owners, tenants, and laborers. Urban industrial unionism was probably the chief influence in its growth. Since many farmers in this region had worked in the past in mines and steel mills, they had seen the tangible economic results of collective action. Olive Stone pointed out that—

North Alabama members of the Farmers Union had the advantage over southern Alabama of cooperation from industrial workers. Whole counties were solidly organized into unions, from coal miners to washwomen, from preachers and teachers to hod carriers. Merchants who would not respect the "union label campaign" and buy according to union prices were boycotted, and farmers refusing to sell through union channels were isolated through the merchant boycott.²⁴

The Farmers Union, following the example of some industrial labor unions, organized Negro farm owners, tenants, and laborers (though there were few of these in the northern counties where the union was strongest). At its peak, according to one former official, it had some 75 colored locals with about 500 dues-paying members. Twenty of these were in Bibb County and the others were in Tuscaloosa, Marion, Walker, and Shelby Counties.

The Farmers Union of Alabama became more like a labor union in form and character during the mid-thirties. The State convention, in December 1936, drew up an ambitious program of cooperation with urban trade-unions, and planned to expand its organization and improve conditions among Negro and white tenants, sharecroppers, and day laborers in cotton. The resolutions that were adopted expressed the interests of wage workers as much as proprietors.²⁵

²⁴Olive Stone: *Agrarian Conflict in Alabama*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill 1939 (p. 520).

Walker County, Ala., claimed to be proportionately the most thoroughly unionized county in the United States. By 1937 it reported 15,000 workers organized into unions, while the Farmers Union was represented by 81 locals with 3,800 members. (*Union News*, organ of the C.I.O. Industrial Union Council of Walker County, Jasper, Ala., May 6, 1937.)

²⁵*Rural Worker*, Vol. I, No. 1, December 1936 (p. 2):

(Birmingham, Ala.) "Three hundred delegates at the annual State convention of the Alabama Farmers Union unanimously adopted a fighting program to improve the conditions of sharecroppers and farm tenants in this State. Representing over 6,000 dues-paying members and sharecroppers who follow the leadership of the Alabama Farmers Union, the State convention backed a 10-point program dealing with the problems and needs of the thousands of tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and day laborers in cotton. * * * A plan seeking to establish cooperation between the Farmers Union and the United Textile Workers with the American Federation of Labor to force the use of a union label on all cotton throughout the South was discussed and adopted. The main points of this plan are:

1. "To organize the cotton farmers, tenants, and sharecroppers strong enough to control at least 50 per cent of the cotton produced."

2. "Through the agreement, which the Farmers Union has with the American Federation of Labor, the textile workers will refuse to spin cotton that does not have the label of the Farmers Union on the bale."

The 10-point program to organize and improve the conditions of the tenants, sharecroppers, and day laborers follows:

"Resolved, That the Alabama Division, Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union of America, will strive with all its power to secure:

"1. The right of sharecroppers and tenant farmers to gin and sell their own cotton.

"2. The right of day laborers, sharecroppers, and tenant farmers to cash crop advances, the right to trade where they please, and for abolition of the commissary-store system.

"3. The right to check and inspect accounts between landlord and sharecropper or tenant by his or their chosen representatives.

"4. The right of sharecroppers and tenants to Government relief without the necessity of the landlord's authorization.

"5. Higher wages for farm workers and abolition of the southern wage differential.

"6. Abolition of the poll tax.

(Continued on p. 292)

The divergent interests of the various geographic and occupational groups within the union caused administrative difficulties. During 1937 the union, as described in more detail below, agreed with certain farm-labor organizations to exchange some members in order to have greater homogeneity. These arrangements were made chiefly through the influence and organized pressure of left-wing members in the farm group, backed by urban industrial unions of the Birmingham area. They provoked opposition from some of the established leaders of the Farmers Union. The State secretary-treasurer in a communication to the Union News, organ of the Walker County Central Labor Council, in the spring of 1937 charged that—

The Communists are breaking into our ranks, the leaders of the tenant farmer and other so-called farm union organizations. Clyde Johnson of Birmingham (ex-organizer of the Sharecroppers Union) and W. M. Martin (provisional president of the Farm Laborers and Cotton Field Workers Union, No. 20471, A. F. of L.) are the leaders, and they are getting good-meaning men to endorse their organization. Therefore the officials of the true Farmers Union have been placed in a position that we must take action against them at once. * * * The Walker County Union in session at Jasper has endorsed this labor organization, not knowing that Johnson and Martin are trying to put their organization ahead of the true union and are using this Farmers' Educational and Cooperative Union of Alabama as a cat's paw to put their RED stuff over with. (Union News, April 15, 1937, p. 6.)

Farmers Union locals in several counties—Bibb, Winston, Fayette, Franklin, Marion, Tuscaloosa, and Shelby—nevertheless, had all voted by July 1937 to affiliate to the C.I.O. through its newly established State Industrial Union Council.²⁶ The two groups were drawn closer together by the increasing employment which small farmers were finding in the strongly unionized mining industry during the recovery period of the late thirties.

The Farmers Union of Alabama declined rapidly in membership during that period. In most counties it apparently depended upon a substantial labor membership, and upon the support of the urban labor movement. By 1940 it still survived only in industrial areas, including Walker, Andoga, Bibb, Shelby, Blunt, and Franklin Counties, and in farming areas having commercialized trade relationships with urban shipping centers, particularly Baldwin County in the Gulf area.

Origin of Sharecroppers' Union of Alabama

The most dramatic rural organization in Alabama during the thirties was the Negro farm workers' and tenants' Sharecroppers Union. This was one result of the Communist Party's organization campaign among southern Negroes, which also gave rise to such incidents as the celebrated Scottsboro case, the Angelo Herndon trial, and the numerous mine "disorders" in the Birmingham area. Although initiated by "outside" white radical influences, these incidents were, nevertheless, symptomatic

⁷ Federal support of education, free textbooks, better buildings, adequate transportation facilities, and free hot lunches.

⁸ An end to violence against union members, prosecution by State and Federal authorities of those who violate our civil and constitutional rights, and the right to organize, meet, strike, picket, and bargain collectively.

⁹ Cancellation of unjust debts to large landlords. Protection of stock, tools, and other property of sharecroppers and tenants against seizure for debt.

¹⁰ No discrimination against colored farmers in these proposals."

²⁶ Union News, July 26, 1937; October 7, 1937.

of underlying unrest and antipathy in the established relationships between the whites and Negroes.

The Communist Third International in the late twenties launched its program for mobilizing for revolutionary action the most exploited elements in capitalist countries. This was carried out in the United States through the Trade Union Unity League, which concentrated on organizing unskilled industrial mass-production workers and agricultural tenants and laborers who had been ignored hitherto by the American Federation of Labor. Special attention in the Southern States was paid to cotton-plantation sharecroppers (particularly Negroes), to textile workers, and to laborers in mines, smelters, and steel mills.

The most lasting successes in Alabama were in the Birmingham industrial area. A long and bitter history of race conflict arising from job competition, wage cutting, and strikebreaking was ended finally during the thirties when industrial unions under white domination began admitting Negroes to membership. The new labor movement met hostile legislative restrictions and violent suppression from employers and law-enforcement authorities.²⁷ These tactics in the long run served to unify still further the labor interests of Negroes and whites and to strengthen the influence of Communist organizers. Much the same labor policy in regard to the Negro was continued after the Trade Union Unity League had been dissolved and its affiliates absorbed into the A.F. of L. and C.I.O. unions. An official of the United Mine Workers in Birmingham reported in 1937 that—

We have completely unionized several of the mines here. We have both white and Negro members and they are learning to work hand in hand. The bosses tried to scare them with "social equality" stuff and with dynamite and machine guns, but they have stuck together. The Negroes are our best members. They were desperate. The union helped them, and now they are ready to fight and die before they see the union broken up. (Guy B. Johnson: *Negro Racial Movements and Leadership in the United States*, p. 69.)

Conservative whites in Birmingham admitted that the psychology of colored workers was changing, and complained that the Negroes were getting "uppity."

The doctrines of unionism found ready response among Negro tenants, sharecroppers, and laborers, who were undergoing severe hardships during the years of depression. It is difficult to judge whether the burdens of depression which fell so heavily on the cotton-growing areas of the South were especially severe in Alabama, and whether sharecroppers suffered more in this State than in others. Prof. Harold Hoffsommer in a study of 1,022 Alabama farm households receiving relief during 1933 estimated that in 89 percent of the years spent at sharecropping, the net economic outcome for this group was either to break even or to suffer a loss. He concluded that the so-called financial loss to the sharecropper was largely a decline of social or occupational status and an increased dependence upon landlords, since in most instances the sharecroppers had no finances to lose.²⁸

²⁷In the early thirties, for instance, a city ordinance was passed which made it a crime punishable by a \$100 fine and 6 months' imprisonment to possess more than one copy of a radical publication. More than 60 persons, white and Negro, were arrested under this law. Many, it was charged, were kidnapped and beaten by vigilantes after being released. (Bruce Crawford: *Bullets Fell in Alabama*, in *The Nation*, Vol. 141, No. 3663, September 19, 1935, p. 319).

²⁸Harold Hoffsommer: *Landlord-Tenant Relations and Relief in Alabama* (p. 2).

THE CAMP HILL AFFAIR, 1931

The first local of the Sharecroppers Union (S.C.U.) was organized in Tallapoosa County in 1931, before Federal Government relief and crop-reduction programs had been introduced. Early in the year the Trade Union Unity League's official paper, the *Southern Worker*, reported receiving a letter asking that an organizer be sent to Tallapoosa County, Ala., to help the debt-ridden sharecroppers and renters of that area, who were burdened with mortgage foreclosures and ruinously low prices for their produce.²⁹ Apparently the movement first took hold among tenants above the bottom rungs of the "agricultural ladder," in the section of the county which most resembled the plantation Black Belt area in farm values, tenancy, and racial composition of the population. Its proximity to Birmingham influenced the attitudes of the rural Negroes. Local men who had been to and from that city in search of jobs or who had worked in the coal mines of northern Alabama spread union doctrines among family members, friends, and acquaintances on the land.

The actual direction of the movement originated from Communist Party headquarters in Birmingham. Local authorities claimed that secret meetings were being held under the sponsorship of Negro and white agitators from Chattanooga. Literature of an "incendiary nature, designed to stir up race trouble between white landlords and Negro tenants," was reported distributed. The organizers, according to the *Birmingham News* of July 20, 1931, were urging Negro laborers to demand "social equality with the white race, \$2 a day for work, and not ask but 'demand what you want, and if you don't get it, take it.'"

The reactions of the local community to these developments were duplicated many times in the South during the following years. A union of tenants, croppers, and laborers was by its very nature a threat to the plantation system. In seeking to release these groups from dependence upon the planter and to give them a voice in renting and sharecropping contracts, the movement was "revolutionary" and treated as such. Not only was the plantation system being menaced, but the biracial relationship of social classes was also being upset through the Negro's "getting out of his place." Hence the union soon faced violent suppression from growers and local authorities, aided by other resident whites.

Trouble first broke out openly on July 16, 1931, when the county sheriff and deputies broke up a meeting held to protest the Scottsboro convictions. At another meeting held the following night a Negro who was standing guard was reported to have shot and wounded the sheriff. A manhunt was started by the chief of police of Camp Hill (Tallapoosa County), and when authorities arrived at the Negro's house they found it barricaded and held by armed colored farmers. In the ensuing exchange of shots 1 Negro was killed, 5 were wounded, and 30 were later rounded up and imprisoned in the county jail.³⁰

Metropolitan newspapers emphasized the racial aspects of the sensational outbreak. The *Birmingham News* described it thus:

This little community [Dadeville, the county seat] had the appearance Friday of an armed camp. * * * During the night the constant crackle of rifle and shotgun fire in the wooded slopes near Mary, Ala., recalled nights in No Man's Land. * * * All available men, armed with sawed-off shotguns, rifles, pistols, and other types of firearms, patrol the highways and search the fields. * * * Few Negroes are visible

²⁹*Rural Worker*, Vol. 1, No. 5, December 1935 (p. 1).

³⁰John Beecher: *The Sharecroppers Union in Alabama*, in *Social Forces*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, 1934 (pp. 125, 126).

on the streets or in the fields. * * * It is estimated there are 600 white men under arms. (Quoted from Dadeville, Spot Cash, July 23, 1931, p. 4.)

The local newspaper, the Dadeville Spot Cash, vigorously denied these statements and charged Birmingham papers with misrepresenting the facts. It played down the incident, asserting that not more than 20 men were deputized and that very few more were armed. In an editorial it praised the coolness of the local population during the emergency:

Both races did their part nobly and patriotically. * * * Both races displayed the spirit that characterizes a great people. * * * Particular praise is due to the colored citizenship of this part of the county for their conduct during the excitement which lasted for about 2 days. * * * [They] left it to the law to take its course. (Spot Cash, July 23, 1931, p. 2.)

THE REELTOWN AFFAIR, 1932

Suppression did not kill unionism among sharecroppers but drove it underground. Meetings were held secretly and local units were kept small in size. No further outbreaks occurred for more than a year, and the S.C.U. grew quietly. By the spring of 1932 it claimed 500 members, most of them in Tallapoosa and Chambers Counties.³¹ Organizing activities continued under the direction of the Communist Party headquarters in Birmingham, where city police were currently busy breaking up meetings of the Committee of the Unemployed and other such groups. Newspapers stressed particularly the "subversive" nature of the movement. A letter, reported to have been sent from the party headquarters to one Sharecroppers' Union local in Tallapoosa County, received wide publicity:

The question should be the day-to-day agitation of all the comrades, not only in this local but in all the locals. Do not hold meetings in empty houses. Do not face the lights of cars, and do not use flashlights. Never walk in too large crowds.

Never take action with arms before notifying us, unless it is impossible to get out of a trap without fire. If ever the meetings are run in on by the sheriff or other officers, don't attempt to hold the meeting next day or night, or that week.³²

Another outbreak accompanied by loss of life occurred in the county in December 1932, when the union came to the defense of a leading member, Cliff James, against whom a writ of attachment had been served by a deputy sheriff. James previously had been denied credit by merchants, and his landlord, to whom he had been making regular payments with interest until cotton dropped to 6 cents a pound, refused to allow him to defer a year's payment. James refused to give up his workstock when the writ of attachment was served. Union members claimed a deliberate effort was being made to ruin the leading organizers. When the sheriff and several deputies came to seize the property, they found armed Negroes barricading the house. In the ensuing combat, the sheriff and two deputies were wounded, while one Negro was killed and several others were wounded.³³

Mob action and violence far surpassing that of the previous year followed. Mobs invaded the houses of several union members and were reported to have shot, killed, and beaten several Negroes. Poses of more than 500 men went on a manhunt, tracking down Negro union members in the woods where they were hiding for safety. Sheriff Young,

³¹Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 5, December 1935 (p. 4).

³²Dadeville Herald, December 22, 1932 (p. 4).

³³John Beecher: The Sharecroppers Union in Alabama (pp. 127, 128).

in an interview, stated that he did not know how many Negroes had been killed in the battle and the subsequent 4 days of rioting.³⁴

Popular metropolitan newspaper accounts again wrote sensationally of "race war" and "red violence," while the local Dadeville Herald played down the incident. That paper denied that the trouble was primarily an interracial clash, stating that "had the Negro James and his companions been whites, it couldn't have been handled differently. Sheriff Young and his deputies are to be commended."³⁵ An editorial dated February 29, 1932, stated:

Both our officials, including the sheriff and his deputies and all officers of the law, also our Negro citizens and the masses of our white people, are to be commended for the cool manner in which in two instances they have let uprisings pass.

Local and metropolitan papers both agreed that "agitators" were responsible for the incident. The attitude of the Birmingham News in an editorial dated December 22, 1932 (p. 8), was perhaps typical:

The deplorable affair in Tallapoosa County is an example of what comes of the activities of Communist agitators in preying upon ignorant Negroes in these times of unrest and stirring up bitterness among some of them.

Only the Birmingham Post, according to John Beecher, in one editorial recognized the deeper causes of the conflict:

It would be exceedingly superficial to regard the disturbance between Negro farmers and sheriff's deputies at Reeltown as a "race riot." * * *

The causes of the trouble are essentially economic rather than racial. The resistance of the Negroes at Reeltown against the the officers seeking to attach their livestock on a lien bears a close parallel to the battles fought in Iowa and Wisconsin between farmers and sheriffs' deputies seeking to serve eviction papers.

A good many farmers, ground down by the same relentless economic pressure from which the Negroes were suffering, expressed sympathy with the Negroes' desperate plight, although thoroughly disapproving of their resistance to the law. (John Beecher: *The Sharecroppers Union in Alabama*, pp. 130-131.)

The rank and file were surprisingly persistent in spite of the forceful suppression of the union and the arrests of its most active leaders. Members and sympathizers poured into the county seat at Dadeville before dawn on the day set for the first trial of those arrested. When they filled the courtroom and overflowed into the square, the judge postponed the hearings. Care was taken on the second day to block the highways to town and to pack the courthouse with whites beforehand. The Negroes came, nevertheless, along bypaths and across streams and ditches. They demanded to be seated, and the judge requested the whites to clear one-half the courtroom for them. The trial resulted in sentences of several years for those convicted.³⁶

Avoiding any outward signs of collective action, the S.C.U. continued to grow secretly despite the temporary crippling in Tallapoosa County. By the spring of 1933, according to its spokesmen, the union had some 3,000 members, including a few white sharecroppers, and had extended its influence to other counties.³⁷ Expansion of rural and urban unionism in the South was encouraged at this time by financial support from the Garland fund. A philanthropist who had inherited a large fortune donated money to establish and maintain a southern organizing committee, designed to promote the work of "progressive organizations" in the South.

³⁴Dadeville Herald, December 22, 1932 (p. 2); Beecher, *op. cit.* (pp. 129-130).

³⁵Idem, February 29, 1932 (p. 1).

³⁶Olive Stone: *Agrarian Conflict in Alabama* (p. 541).

³⁷*Rural Worker*, Vol. I, No. 5, December 1935 (p. 4).

The Sharecroppers Union began to give more attention to collective-bargaining tactics, as new issues created friction and unrest. Federal Government programs for rural relief and for crop and acreage reduction were special sources of contention. In a survey of Alabama plantations in late 1933, Professor Hoffsommer found that sharecroppers had small financial profit from the AAA, because in 60 percent of the cases the money had passed on to the landlords.³⁸ He concluded that planters were apprehensive of any Government program, whether for relief or rehabilitation, that promised to bring independence to sharecroppers and laborers and thus to threaten the whole plantation system. Landlords insisted that they have control over the granting of relief.³⁹

Some improvement in the position of Alabama sharecroppers and farm laborers was claimed during 1934. The State statistician reported that "the supply of farm labor is 97 percent of normal against 115 percent last year, while the demand this year is 74 percent of normal against 61 percent last year."⁴⁰ Farm wages in Tallapoosa and nearby counties, however, remained at \$15 per month without board. The local Director of Rural Rehabilitation complained that landlords were trying to have their crops subsidized indirectly by getting their tenants on relief.⁴¹

The Sharecroppers Union in the fall of 1934 called its first strike. About 500 cotton pickers in Tallapoosa County struck for a wage rate of 75 cents per hundredweight. Organized sharecroppers and laborers refused to go into the fields unless they were paid the union rate they demanded. When they were threatened, they pleaded sickness. They won demands in a few local areas, spokesmen reported.⁴²

Organization in the Black Belt

In the mid-thirties the Sharecroppers Union of Alabama shifted the center of its activities to Lowndes, Montgomery, and Dallas Counties, in the Black Belt lying south of Montgomery, the State capital. The farm structure in this area was one of large plantations employing mainly day laborers, in contrast to most of Tallapoosa and Chambers Counties in the northeast Piedmont area, where smaller farms were operated by tenants and croppers. Sharecroppers and tenants in the Black Belt had been displaced in large numbers by mechanized farming methods and Government crop-restriction programs. A steadily growing proportion of plantation labor was being done by casual wage workers who found intermittent employment at seasonal jobs. The S.C.U. under these changed conditions became concerned primarily with the wage rates paid for the two chief seasonal jobs of cotton chopping and picking, rather than with the terms of leasing or crop-sharing over the year.

The union found that the task of organizing the Negro in the large plantations of the Black Belt was easier than in the smaller holdings in eastern Alabama because of homogeneity of the labor and the close contacts among workers on each plantation. They were more subject to attack and intimidation, however, since they lived in compact groups under the domination of individual planters. Strikes for higher wage

³⁸Harold Hoffsommer: *Landlord-Tenant Relations and Relief in Alabama* (p. 2).

³⁹The disturbing effects of relief were feared where many sharecroppers received from it more cash in a single week than they had been accustomed to receiving in an entire year. Thirty-two percent of the landlords interviewed objected to relief on the ground that it accustomed tenants to spending cash and might result in discontent in future sharecropping or wage-labor arrangements. (Hoffsommer: *Landlord-Tenant Relations and Relief in Alabama*, p. 3.)

⁴⁰Dadeville Herald, April 26, 1934 (p. 1).

⁴¹Idem, April 19, 1934 (p. 1).

⁴²Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 5, December 1935 (p. 4).

scales were broken with violence and finality by a combination of landlords, managers, and overseers, and local law-enforcement officers.

The Sharecroppers Union of Alabama claimed 10,000 members by 1935. In the spring of that year it called a strike of cotton choppers in an attempt to raise wage rates throughout five counties. Approximately 1,500 workers were reported to have held out for almost a month for a basic wage of \$1 per day. Compromise wage increases were won in several sections.⁴³ According to union spokesmen a "great wave of terror broke out against the strike," particularly in Dallas County. Two white organizers, it was claimed, were arrested, and were beaten by a mob after being released.⁴⁴

Union organizers were intensely active during the summer of 1935 in cotton and other agricultural industries of Alabama. The employees of several dairies in the Birmingham milkshed area during July struck in protest against wages reported to be as low as \$1 per working day of 15 hours. A federal labor union was organized by the strikers and affiliated to the A.F. of L., and plans were made to extend the union to the Montgomery area.⁴⁵ Several thousand seasonally employed shrimp fishermen and part-time farmers along the Gulf Coast were reported organized in federal labor unions in such towns as Biloxi and Gulfport, Miss., Delacroix and Morgan City, La., and Bayou and La Batre, Ala. They claimed substantial gains in earnings after a prolonged strike of several months during the summer and fall of 1935.⁴⁶

The Sharecroppers Union, now having central headquarters in Montgomery to direct activities in the Black Belt region, prepared for a general strike in cotton picking over several States. Union spokesmen by this time claimed 12,000 members, 2,500 of these being scattered throughout Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, and North Carolina.⁴⁷ Organized cotton pickers formulated demands for \$1 minimum wage for 10 hours' work and \$1 per hundredweight for cotton picking, as well as provisions for room, board, and transportation. The S.C.U. sought a "unity agreement" with the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, which at the same time was preparing for a similar strike in Arkansas and Oklahoma.⁴⁸

⁴³Josiah C. Folsom: *Labor Disputes in Agriculture, 1927-38.*

⁴⁴*Rural Worker*, Vol. I, No. 5, December 1935 (p. 4).

⁴⁵*Idem*, Vol. I, No. 1, August 1935 (p. 2).

⁴⁶*Idem*, Vol. I, No. 3, October 1935 (p. 4).

⁴⁷*Idem*, Vol. I, No. 5, December 1935 (p. 4).

⁴⁸*Idem*, Vol. I, No. 1, August 1935 (p. 2).

UNITED FRONT CALL

Proposals for united action were presented by the Share Croppers Union to the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and the Alabama Farmers Union.

1. For \$1 a day (minimum) for 10 hours' work on the farms, plus room and board for monthly help, and plus two meals and transportation for temporary help; for \$1 per hundred pounds for picking cotton; and for a united cotton pickers' strike to enforce these demands.

2. For cotton and tobacco crop-control checks to be made out and sent directly to the sharecroppers and tenants:

For the right to sell or store their own cotton when and where they please;

For abolition of the landlord store system; and

For general reduction in "sure" rent.

3. For cancellation of all back debts, taxes, etc., for poor farmers, croppers, and tenants:

Against foreclosures, for the right to stay on the land; and

For the abolition of the Bankhead gin tax for all farmers raising less than 10 bales of cotton;

4. For 40 cents an hour, 140 hours a month on all relief jobs. All skilled work at trade-union wages;

For direct cash relief at the rate of \$8 a week for the head of the family plus \$3 for each dependent; and

For \$5 a week cash relief for unemployed single workers and youths.

5. For a planned boycott of meat and other foods to force prices down.

6. For the right to organize, meet, petition, strike, and picket without interference: and

Against lynching and landlord terror.

7. No discrimination against Negroes, women, or youths in these demands.

A strike was called in August 1935 to implement the union-wage demands throughout six counties in southern and eastern Alabama. It began on August 19 on one large plantation in Lowndes County, where the pickers were attempting to raise the wage rate to \$1 per hundred-weight in place of the prevailing 40 cents. The planter called for aid from County Sheriff Woodruff and his deputies. The strike spread to other plantations in spite of arrests of local union organizers and a formidable show of arms.⁴⁹

The struggle soon developed into a miniature civil war. The Montgomery Advertiser claimed that Communist organizers were employing force and intimidation, even to the point of using guns to "ambush" cotton pickers who refused to join the strike. Authorities claimed that white organizers from Montgomery were breaking Federal law by placing unmailed mimeographed literature in mailboxes, warning Negroes that they would be killed if they returned to work in the fields. Violent means were used to suppress the strike. Local newspapers reported at the end of August that "with the Federal, State, county, and city authorities cooperating in the hunt for Communist organizers, officers said they were confident that agitators would be apprehended if they continued long in this vicinity."⁵⁰

Union spokesmen on the other hand claimed that their members had to arm themselves in self-defense. Local authorities were charged with encouraging illegal mob action to break the strike. The union secretary stated that Sheriff Woodruff organized a gang of vigilantes for "night riding," breaking into strikers' homes, kidnapping and beating them in an effort to terrorize them into returning to work.⁵¹ A delegation of union officials traveled to Washington to protest these incidents to the Administrator of the AAA. They listed 20 strikers who were beaten or flogged and 6 who were killed (including 3 known local union members⁵² and 3 unidentified bullet-riddled bodies of Negroes reported found in swamps near Fort Deposit and Calhoun).⁵³ A local postmaster was charged with illegally opening mail addressed to farm hands and sharecroppers as a means of identifying union members for the authorities.⁵³ The Alabama State Relief Administration was charged with allowing relief workers to be transported in Government trucks from Montgomery to Black Belt plantations. There they were paid 50 cents per hundredweight for picking cotton, though they continued to receive relief from the Government.⁵³ To counteract this move, union organizers attempted to extend the strike to relief workers in Lowndes, Montgomery, and nearby counties. This failed because of what the Montgomery Advertiser termed "drastic steps taken by delegated authorities to quell the spread of Communist doctrine and literature."⁵⁴

⁴⁹Thomas Burke: We Told Washington (in *The Nation*, Vol. 141, No. 3674, December 4, 1935, pp. 649-650).

⁵⁰Montgomery Advertiser, issues of August 23, 1935 (p. 1), August 24, 1935 (p. 1), and August 31, 1935 (p. 8).

⁵¹Thomas Burke: We Told Washington (in *The Nation*, December 4, 1935, p. 649).

⁵²One of the local union officers was reported "shot while trying to escape." However, the conservative Dadeville Record commented that "the statement by men down in Lowndes County that a Negro in their custody jumped out of their car and into a ditch, and was coming up out of the ditch with a gun when they fired upon him and killed him, may be a correct version of what actually happened, but to say the least it sounds a little 'fishy.'" (Dadeville Record, August 29, 1935, p. 4.)

⁵³Burke, op. cit. (p. 649).

One explanation for the extreme violence lay in the fact that Lowndes County had about the highest proportion of Negroes for its total population of any county in the country. Hence the apprehension on the part of the white minority.

⁵⁴Montgomery Advertiser, August 31, 1935 (p. 8).

Forceful suppression limited the effectiveness of the strike to a few localities. The union reported in September that most strikers in Lowndes County had finally been forced to return to their plantations to pick cotton at 40 cents per hundredweight.⁵⁵ The union secretary in a later report, however, claimed that the total income for cotton workers for the season was increased by approximately \$40,000 as a result of the strike, and that wages had been raised in counties adjoining the strike area. Wages were reported increased from the prevailing 35 and 40 cents up to 65 cents per hundredweight in the vicinities of Burkeville and Lowndesboro in the southern part of Lowndes County.⁵⁶

The union had been established longer and had more members in Tallapoosa, Chambers, Lee, and Randolph Counties northeast of Montgomery. The strike began in scattered localities of this section during September, as the cotton crop became ready for picking. Though not so large and well organized as in the Black Belt, the strike met with less hostility and violence from the community. In Lafayette (Chambers County) 65 relief workers sent out to replace the strikers all quit work after 3 days.⁵⁷ Union spokesmen claimed that in many places small farmers, both white and colored, supported the strikers with food and shelter.⁵⁷

Cotton sharecroppers throughout the South won temporary gains during 1935 and 1936, partly as a result of the strikes and the agitation against AAA on the part of the Sharecroppers Union of Alabama and the Southern Tenant Farmers Union of Arkansas. Late in 1935 the Federal Government announced that it would make cotton benefit payments for the following year directly to tenants instead of to landlords. The new contracts also provided that the sharecroppers' portion of total benefit payments to planters was to be raised to \$25 out of every \$100, instead of the previous year's \$15.⁵⁸

Relations with A.F. of L. and C.I.O.

The chief interest of the S.C.U. during 1936 was to affiliate itself to larger farmer and labor organizations. It sought to organize Negro and white farm operators (sharecroppers, tenants, and small owners) and Negro and white farm laborers into separate but cooperating unions. The circumstances in which the S.C.U. operated made it difficult to conduct simultaneously activities benefiting both wage hands and farm tenants, since their needs were different. According to Clyde Johnson, former organizer, there was a growing tendency for tenants and small owners to dominate all locals; thus the wage workers were in a disadvantageous position.⁵⁹

The Sharecroppers Union was finally dissolved and its farm-operator membership was transferred to the Farmers Union of Alabama after much negotiation and numerous conferences between the two groups. The Farmers Union in turn released its labor membership to a newly

⁵⁵Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 2, September 1935 (p. 1).

⁵⁶Idem, Vol. I, No. 5, December 1935 (p. 4).

⁵⁷Idem, Vol. I, No. 3, October 1935 (p. 4).

⁵⁸Idem, Vol. I, No. 5, December 1935 (p. 1).

⁵⁹Letter by Clyde Johnson (in Social Work Today, Vol. 5, No. 6, March 1938, p. 22).

organized Alabama Agricultural Workers Union, and an ambitious organization campaign was planned for both unions.⁶⁰

The Alabama Agricultural Workers Union early in 1937 received a charter from the A.F. of L. as the Farm Laborers and Cotton Field Workers Union No. 20471. By early spring it claimed a membership of more than 10,000 through the acquisition of wage laborers from the S.C.U. and the Farmers Union.⁶¹ It called a conference of agricultural workers in Birmingham during March to fix wage scales for farm labor in Alabama. The union planned to "popularize the scale throughout the State, utilizing every possible channel to make this scale known and to get public sentiment behind it." In line with farm-labor union policy in other States, the F.L.C.F.W.U. sought the cooperation of various farm organizations and urban trade-unions to establish a State-wide agricultural workers organizing committee.⁶² More than 100 delegates from branches of the F.L.C.F.W.U. No. 20471 attended the conference together with fraternal delegates from the Alabama Farmers Union, the United Mine Workers, the National Association for Advancement of Colored People, and kindred organizations. William Mitch, president of District 20, U.M.W., and former president of the Alabama Federation of Labor, promised the new union the "full support of the labor movement of this State."⁶³ Standard wage scales far above the prevailing rates were endorsed for farm workers: \$1.50 per day for cotton chopping, \$1.25 per hundredweight for cotton picking, and \$1.25 per day for general farm labor.⁶⁴

The F.L.C.F.W.U. No. 20471 was absorbed into the newly organized United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America of the C.I.O. a few months later. Little was done toward meeting the announced farm-labor union objectives. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s most important activities were carried on in other States, while in Alabama the C.I.O. was chiefly interested in organizing the steel industry in the Birmingham industrial area.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s most important gains in Alabama were won in northern and northeastern counties. As a result of a national agreement signed in Minneapolis in December 1937, between the Farmers Union and the U.C.A.P.A.W.A., branches of the two organizations in Alabama cooperated more closely. Together they directed a campaign to encourage tenants and sharecroppers to vote on the crop-control plan of the AAA, hitherto under the domination of larger planters.⁶⁴

⁶⁰Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 16, December 1936 (p. 4); Vol. II, No. 1, January 1937 (p. 2). Farm wage workers in the S.C.U. were directed to join the A.F. of L. in accordance with convention resolutions. In communities where most of the farms were operated by wage labor, A.F. of L. unions were to be organized. In communities where tenants and wage workers were about equally divided, both a Farmers Union and an A.F. of L. local were to be formed. In communities where there were only two or three wage workers they were to be organized in the Farmers Union. At all times the closest cooperation was to be maintained between the two groups.

At the final meeting of the executive council of the S.C.U. on November 15, 1936, the union voted to undertake the following: (1) To organize 50 locals of the Farmers Union by January 1, 1937. (2) To begin immediate organization of farm wage workers into the Alabama Agricultural Workers Union. (3) A State-wide petition campaign for abolition of the poll tax in Alabama. All labor, farmer, church, and other groups were to be called upon to support this campaign. (4) A campaign to win drought relief and better conditions on WPA. (5) To conduct a school for union organizers. (6) To examine school conditions in rural areas and prepare for a school strike in some sections. (7) To begin a drive for written sharecrop contracts immediately. (8) To get one thousand subscriptions for the Southern Farm Leader, organ of the Sharecroppers Union, by January 1, 1937.

⁶¹Birmingham Post, April 16, 1937 (p. 4)

⁶²Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 4, April 1937 (p. 1).

⁶³Birmingham Post, April 19, 1937 (p. 3).

⁶⁴CIO News, March 26, 1938 (p. 7).

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. reported 4 locals in eastern Alabama by March 1938, and by late summer it claimed 17 locals with a total of 1,000 members. These organized sharecroppers late in 1938 successfully agitated for work relief divorced from the control of local plantation owners.⁶⁵

This was the last activity of the rural unions in Alabama. The national U.C.A.P.A.W.A. organization was forced to reduce its budget drastically because of business recession and loss of union revenue. Unionizing campaigns were restricted largely to metropolitan areas having important agricultural processing industries. U.C.A.P.A.W.A. organizations of farm laborers in Alabama and other States were abandoned.

Southern Tenant Farmers Union of Arkansas

Plantations of East Arkansas

The most dramatic landlord-tenant strife during the thirties occurred in the State of Arkansas, where the Southern Tenant Farmers Union was organized.

The nature and structure of plantation farming in the Delta cotton counties of eastern Arkansas appeared to be especially conducive to friction. The river-bottom lands of this section were not developed until the early 1900's, because the land could not be settled permanently until adequate levees had been built to control the periodic floods. The settlers in this period had fewer of the southern traditions of mutual loyalty and responsibility on the land. The plantations on the whole were larger and more commercialized than in other southern cotton-growing areas, and relations between landlords and tenants were more impersonal. The planters were more practical than their traditional prototypes. A large proportion of the planters were absentee owner-investors who bought plantations as business enterprises to be run for profit, rather than as estates to furnish a "way of life" for country gentlemen.⁶⁶

Discord emerged most often, according to some observers, on absentee-owned farms controlled by insurance companies, city business firms, and other outside investors. Hired managers and riding bosses left in charge of plantations often exploited the sharecroppers for their own benefit while the owners were unsuspecting. Other observers, in contrast, argue that absentee plantations tended to maintain better relations with their tenants because they were more in the public eye than were small locally owned units.

Tenants and farm laborers in the Arkansas Delta were considered less stable and reliable than those in other southern cotton regions. They were migrants who had come from States to the Southeast, rather than long-established residents. Dissatisfaction and latent unrest had long

⁶⁵U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Yearbook, Second Annual Convention, San Francisco, Vol. I, December 1938 (p. 12).

⁶⁶Some local authorities charge that the most ruthless and callous plantation owners in this area have been northern owners and industrialists, with the typical industrial urban irresponsibility for one's laborers in times of depression. Among such owners are former lumber companies which, when the timber supply was exhausted, converted their cut-over land into cotton plantations.

On the other hand, some notably benevolent plantation enterprises have been dominated by outside financial interests.

been evident in east Arkansas in the unusually high rate of mobility or turn-over among sharecroppers and tenants.⁶⁷

In Arkansas both planters and sharecroppers were out for what they could get, and planters were likely to get more because they had the upper hand. A landlord did not usually rely upon voluntary cooperation and loyalty from his sharecroppers; his policy was rather to exploit them to the full. This he was generally able to do through the support of the dominant white community and local forces of law and order. Such domination was heightened during periods of depression; in good times sharecroppers were mobile, but with a scarcity of alternative opportunities during hard times, they were likely to remain on the plantation despite greater infringements upon their liberties and inroads on their already meager incomes. The surplus of farm laborers and tenants was particularly serious in eastern Arkansas, because the AAA and the mechanization of farming probably displaced proportionately more farm operators in this section than in other southern cotton-producing areas.

These were the conditions under which organized protest arose from plantation tenants and laborers in east Arkansas. The impetus to organize came partly from their proximity to the city of Memphis. Its urban standards, including those of labor unionism, were most influential in the immediate rural regions. Close trade and ownership relations with city business interests tended to commercialize nearby cotton plantations. The attitudes of farm tenants and laborers were also affected. Memphis is the northernmost large city which imposes strictly southern standards upon the Negro. At the same time it is a focal point of transportation and communication with such northern industrial centers as St. Louis, Chicago, and Detroit, where "Jim Crow" laws do not nominally exist. The effect of this is to instill in many Negroes in Memphis attitudes which white residents consider "uppity" or "cocky."⁶⁸ These in turn radiate to nearby rural districts, where they aggravate the unrest among Negro farm people.

The "Elaine Massacre"

The first important organized conflict in the east Arkansas plantation area occurred during the period immediately after World War I. The cotton market collapsed after a period of prosperity in which both planters and sharecroppers had gained, and falling prices strained landlord-tenant relations and stimulated group discord. In at least one instance the sharecroppers organized to protect themselves. A group in Drew County formed an all-Negro association known as the Progressive

⁶⁷The instability of tenure and economic status is illustrated by a study carried out by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, which indicated frequent changes in location on the part of both sharecroppers and wage-earner families. Though the findings may be biased by the drastic changes of the 1930's, there are indications that mobility in east Arkansas is higher than the average, as compared with South Carolina, for instance. In Laurens and Florence Counties, S. C., sharecroppers and wage laborers, on the average, lived on the same farm between 3 and 4 years. Some families moved back to the same farms two or three times during their lives. In three bottomland counties of Arkansas, on the other hand, the average length of residence on the same farm in 1937 was less than 2 years. Four out of 10 sharecropper and wage-earner families were residing on their 1937 farms for the first time and three out of five had lived there for 2 years or less. Three out of four had lived on their 1937 farms for 4 years or less. (Monthly Labor Review, November 1940, p. 1154.)

⁶⁸This problem periodically comes to the attention of city authorities. Early in 1941, for instance, police and detectives sought to rectify a situation about which white people were complaining, i. e., Negroes sitting in seats usually reserved for whites in busses and streetcars. (Press Scimitar, Memphis, January 21, 1941, p. 7.)

Farmers and Householders Union of America, with headquarters in the town of Winchester.⁶⁹ This organization, incorporated in 1919, formed as a secret fraternal society because the State tax for such organizations was lower than for other types, and the secret passwords, grips, and insignia had a strong attraction for prospective members.

The major aim of the union was to combat exploitation of Negro sharecroppers and laborers, which the organizers felt to be "inherent in the sharecropper system."⁷⁰ Funds were raised by assessing male members \$1.50 each per year and female members 50 cents. The money was to be used to retain a lawyer to act for members who had been victimized by their landlords. The organization was "race conscious" and exclusively Negro in composition, even to the point of barring white sharecroppers from membership. Its statement of principles asserted that it was designed for "advancing the intellectual, material, moral, spiritual, and financial interests of the Negro race."⁷⁰

The first clash with local law-enforcement officers came in October 1919. One local of sharecroppers, aided by the son of a white lawyer, held a meeting to arrange a case against a landlord who was alleged to have seized their shares of cotton. The meeting was broken up by the county sheriff and a group of white citizens. The sharecroppers and the lawyer's son were arrested for "barratry," i.e., encouraging a lawsuit.⁷¹

Violent race conflict broke out later in the month. One white man was killed and another wounded by gunfire while one of the union lodges was meeting in a church in Phillips County. The union contended that the two whites together with a Negro renegade had fired at members in the meeting. Whites claimed that the three men, one of whom was a deputy sheriff, had been fired upon without warning when they parked their car by the side of the road near the church in order to change a tire.⁷²

When news of the killing spread, whites flocked in from other parts of Arkansas and nearby States of Mississippi and Tennessee. Negroes were dismissed from their employment and then arrested. Arms were distributed freely to whites, it was reported. Negroes who took refuge in the canebrake were "hunted down like animals," according to Walter L. White of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.⁷³ Official figures listed 5 whites and 25 Negroes killed, while unofficial observers claimed that the casualty list for Negroes ran upwards of 100 persons.⁷⁴ The alleged conspirators were tried in Phillips County; six were indicted and found guilty in a joint trial that lasted 7 minutes. Twelve Negroes were sentenced to death by electrocution and 80 to imprisonment for terms of from 1 to 20 years.⁷⁴

Explanations for the underlying causes of the outbreak were many and varied. Some local white observers blamed it on "outside" Negroes who attempted to organize a semiracketeering body from which they could collect a small fortune in dues. Another theory charged that white

⁶⁹See W. F. White: *Massacring Whites in Arkansas* (in *The Nation*, Vol. 109, No. 2840, December 6, 1919, p. 715); and *The Race Conflict in Arkansas* (in *The Survey*, Vol. 43, December 13, 1919, p. 233); also, Samuel Tolmach: *Labor Organization in the Cotton Fields*, M. A. Thesis, Brooklyn College, New York, December 1937 (pp. 61-65).

⁷⁰W. F. White: *Massacring Whites in Arkansas* (p. 715).

⁷¹W. F. White: *The Race Conflict in Arkansas* (pp. 233, 234).

⁷²Idem (p. 233).

⁷³Idem (p. 234). White himself, according to his own account, narrowly missed being lynched while investigating the situation and was saved only by the timely warning of another Negro. (See *Proceedings*, S.T.F.U., Oklahoma City, 1937.)

⁷⁴W. F. White: *The Race Conflict in Arkansas* (p. 234).

men were behind it, perhaps dealers in firearms who foresaw a profitable market through stirring up dissatisfaction among Negroes and persuading them to arm for self-protection.⁷⁵ The best explanation lay in the fundamental economic basis for organized resistance and protest by the Negroes. During the period of prosperity and labor scarcity in World War I the Negro sharecroppers had shared in the profits from high cotton prices. In the postwar deflation they bore a major part of the burden. Planters attempted to shift some of their losses to tenants by manipulating accounts and in some cases practicing outright fraud. Negro tenants and sharecroppers sought to organize into a legal association for self-protection and, when the law was found wanting as a protective instrument, they came to rely upon armed resistance.

Displacement in the Thirties

Economic conditions for the sharecroppers improved slightly during the prosperous years of the twenties, and for a time organized agitation was not so necessary. Collective action did not recur until the thirties, when sharecroppers in eastern Arkansas again suffered drastic displacement and loss of income.

Organized protest depended not upon displacement alone, but upon its particular form and its effect upon group relationships within such economic enterprises as the cotton plantation. During the twenties the boll weevil caused mass displacement and migration throughout the southern Cotton Belt. This did not arouse widespread group conflict, however, because it was not a result of a deliberate man-made policy. Displacement created by the trend to power farming and by Government programs of crop reduction, on the other hand, did provoke organized revolt. Cotton acreage was reduced by Government fiat at the same time that plantations were adopting mechanized techniques for planting and cultivating the crop. The demand for labor was doubly reduced, and large numbers of tenants and sharecroppers were dispossessed and depressed to the more insecure status of casual day laborers. This process, together with public relief for the destitute, tended to sever the last ties of tradition, loyalty, and personal sentiment between landlords and tenants, which hitherto had prevented organized opposition to the plantation system.

A number of studies seem to indicate that displacement was particularly severe in the Arkansas Delta. In 1937 Dr. Paul S. Taylor wrote:

It is of particular significance * * * that a mobile labor reserve of cotton workers is developing in the towns and cities of the Mississippi and Arkansas Deltas. It is being recruited largely from families who until recently were tenants, croppers, or laborers on the plantations, but who are having the ground cut out from under them. The failure of industry to absorb rural emigrants, or even to hold those who had left the farms earlier, adds to the available reserves. (Power Farming and Labor Displacement in the Cotton Belt, p. 20.)

A later survey by Earnest J. Holcomb, of the U. S. Bureau of Agricultural Economics, reported that—

⁷⁵One white participant observed that "when he's makin' good money they's three things a nigger will always buy—a good pair of shoes, a good hat, and a good gun. They stocked up on guns when times was good, and got to usin' 'em when times got bad." (Interview, field notes.)

A study of tenure experience in four (bottom-land) counties of Arkansas indicates extreme instability of tenure and of economic status on the part of both wage earners and sharecroppers. In this area the net change was decidedly in the direction of wage labor. The number of share renters per 10,000 acres of cropland fell from 143.1 in 1932 to 104.5 in 1938, and the corresponding number of sharecroppers fell from 798.1 to 581.2. In contrast the number of wage families per 10,000 acres of cropland rose from 247.2 in 1932 to 293.6 in 1938, and the corresponding number of wage hands rose from 27.5 to 39.5.

It is particularly significant that the total amount of labor per 10,000 acres of cropland was 16 percent lower in 1938 than in 1932. This reflects a major change in methods of farming in the direction of mechanization, which in turn has had a tendency not only to reduce the total amount of labor but also to bring about a shift from sharecroppers to hired laborers.⁷⁶

Beginnings of Southern Tenant Farmers Union

The Southern Tenant Farmers Union originated in a background of widespread displacement and discord. It was organized in protest over the Government crop- and acreage-restriction programs. Rev. Howard Kester, a prominent member of the organization, gives the following account of its origin:

Just South of the little town of Tyronza, in Poinsett County, Ark., the Southern Tenant Farmers Union had its beginning. In the early part of July 1934, 27 white and black men, clad in overalls, gathered in a rickety and dingy little schoolhouse called Sunnyside. * * *

Little time was lost in agreeing that they should form some sort of union for their mutual protection. The contracts entered into between the landlords and the Secretary of Agriculture gave the tenant farmer very little and the sharecropper next to nothing, but something, and they considered it worth struggling for anyway. Wholesale violations of the contracts by the planters were occurring daily. Tenants were not getting their "parity payments"; they were being made to sign papers making the landlords trustees of the bale tags; landlords were turning to day labor at starvation wages; the AAA was making things worse. (H. Kester: *Revolt Among the Sharecroppers*, pp. 55-56.)

The question as to whether Negroes and whites should be organized separately or together was soon settled.

An old man with cotton-white hair overhanging an ebony face rose to his feet. He had been in unions before, he said. In his 70 years of struggle the Negro had built many unions only to have them broken up by the planters and the law. He had been a member of a black man's union at Elaine, Ark. He had seen the union with its membership wiped out in the bloody Elaine massacre of 1919. * * * "For a long time now the white folks and the colored folks have been fighting each other and both of us has been getting whipped all the time. We don't have nothing against one another but we got plenty against the landlord." * * * The men decided that the union would welcome Negro and white sharecroppers, tenant farmers and day laborers alike into its fold. (H. Kester: *Revolt Among the Sharecroppers*, pp. 56-57.)

Much of the initiative in the new organization came from the more intellectual members who subscribed to the principles of the Socialist Party,

⁷⁶Earnest J. Holcomb: *Wage Laborers and Sharecroppers in Cotton Production*, in *Monthly Labor Review*, November 1940 (pp. 1153, 1154).

A similar study by C. O. Brannen of the University of Arkansas College of Agriculture found that in seven representative counties cotton acreage in 1938 was only 60 percent of what it had been in 1932. In three Delta cotton counties of Chicot, Mississippi, and Pulaski, average cotton acreages per share-renter had declined from 25 to 13 acres, while those of sharecroppers declined from 15 to 10 acres. At the same time that total cotton acreages and labor requirements were decreasing, mechanical power available for the production of crops was increasing. From 1932 to 1938 the number of tractors per 10,000 acres of cropland increased in the three Delta counties from 10.5 to 17.3 in Chicot, 12.5 to 29.6 in Mississippi, and from 16.8 to 24.3 in Pulaski. (C. O. Brannen: *Changes in Labor Used on Cotton Farms in Upland and Lowland Areas of Arkansas, 1932 to 1938 Inclusive*, Hearings of Tolan Committee, Part 5, Oklahoma City, September 19 and 20, 1940, pp. 1994, 1995.)

which had a long tradition in western Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma. The group in the beginning sought the help of H. L. Mitchell, proprietor of a dry-cleaning establishment in Tyronza, and Clay East, who ran a filling station and also served as town constable. Both were Socialists and known to be sympathetic to the sharecroppers. Others were drawn in as the movement grew. Ministers like Claude Williams, Ward Rogers, and Howard Kester were prominent. J. R. Butler, a country school teacher and former sharecropper, became president of the organization.⁷⁷

The Southern Tenant Farmers Union was incorporated under the laws of Arkansas in July 1934, and promptly formulated a constitution. Its "declaration of principles" had a strong Socialist bent:

Those directly interested in agriculture from a production standpoint are divided into two classes. On the one hand, we have the small owning class who depend on exploiting the working class by rents, interests, and profits. On the other hand we have the actual tillers of the soil who have been ground down to dire poverty and robbed of their rights and privileges. (History of the S.T.F.U., Memphis, Tenn., 1940, p. 2.)

The S.T.F.U. was to be primarily a laborers' rather than an operators' union, in contrast to earlier agrarian organizations of the South, such as the Wheel, the Alliance, and the Farmers Union. The declaration stated:

In order to obtain their rights and better their conditions all workers should organize into a union of their own, so as to oppose the power of the owning class.

We stand ready, at all times, to affiliate with other agricultural workers' organizations, whose principles are in accord with our own, and to build one big union of all agricultural workers.

We stand ready to affiliate with other workers in industry and to build the solidarity of all workers regardless of race, creed, or nationality. (History of the S.T.F.U., p. 2.)

STRIKES AND VIOLENCE

The S.T.F.U. lost its first bout with planters and the law when it attempted to protect the rights of its members under the Federal Government's cotton-control program. The union instituted a suit against a landlord who tried to evict all members of the union from his plantation.⁷⁸ This move was designed to test a provision of the AAA stating that no tenants or sharecroppers could be moved off the land, that they had the right to occupy their houses rent free, and that they were to have the use of the Government-rented land to raise foodstuffs for their families. The union failed to win its suit; the U. S. Department of Agriculture refused

⁷⁷It is quite probable, as a report by the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ pointed out, that the S.T.F.U. met with violent opposition from planters and legal authorities partly because of the prominence of Socialists among its leaders and organizers. It became more apparent when Norman Thomas was brought into the State to address union meetings, and when faculty members and students of the left-wing Commonwealth College (Mena, Ark.) volunteered their services. (See Federal Council of Churches of Christ, New York: The Cotton Choppers Strike in Arkansas, Information Service, Vol. XV, No. 26, June 1936.)

⁷⁸According to one observer, the "seeds of revolt" were planted in the summer of 1934 on this large plantation near Tyronza. Planters were discussing the merits of the plowing-under program which the New Deal had inaugurated. One of them was said to have boasted that the program had been very profitable to him because he had kept all of the Federal payment instead of sharing it with his croppers as he would have shared his cotton. His boast got back to his croppers, who tried without success to obtain a belated settlement.

Two sympathizers heard of their plight and offered aid. They were H. L. Mitchell, the "pants presser" of Tyronza, who was to become executive secretary of the union, and Clay East, Tyronza constable and filling-station proprietor, who was to become the union's first president. (See Oren Stephens: *Revolt on the Delta*, in *Harpers*, November 1941, p. 658.)

to force the planters to abide by this clause of the AAA,⁷⁹ despite picketing of its offices in Washington, D.C., by an S.T.F.U. delegation. Planters then were free to evict tenants and sharecroppers without hindrance.

The S.T.F.U. nevertheless received valuable publicity and outside aid as a result of this issue. A strong corps of effective speakers and organizers, who had good contacts with liberal and left-wing sympathizers the country over, were able to enlist substantial material and moral support.⁸⁰ The union grew rapidly, from 15 locals having a few hundred members in Poinsett County late in 1934, to 75 locals and 15,000 members by mid-1935. It was claimed that 75 percent of the sharecroppers, tenants, and workers in Cross and Poinsett Counties were union members.⁸¹

The aggressiveness of its organizing drive soon brought the S.T.F.U. into open conflict with planters and constituted authorities, who first attempted to block the movement by arresting its leaders on various pretexts. Four organizers were seized in November 1934, when plantation owners complained that the union was "causing discontent among tenant farmers." The defendants were later charged with "obtaining money under false pretenses" because they had collected union dues.⁸² Ward Rogers, a hill-country preacher serving with the S.T.F.U., was arrested and jailed in Marked Tree, Ark., on a charge of "anarchy." The charges in both cases soon had to be dropped because of adverse newspaper publicity and investigations by private and public bodies.

When these methods failed, the planters resorted to extra-legal violence and intimidation. Widely known papers such as the St. Louis Post Dispatch and the New York Times reported many incidents. F. Raymond Daniels described a situation of minor civil war in a series of articles written for the New York Times:

Attempts to better their lot through organization in the Southern Tenant Farmers Union have taught them [sharecroppers] that they have few rights under the laws of Arkansas, and no more security under the New Deal than they have had in the past. Scores have been evicted and "run off the place" * * * and masked night riders have spread fear among union members, both black and white. In some communities the most fundamental rights of free speech and assemblage have been abridged. (April 15, 1935, issue.)

For a time the union was allowed to proceed with its organization work without molestation. Then, as it became more assertive, reprisals were begun. There were evictions, outbreaks of violence against the organizers, and meetings were broken up by planters and riding bosses encouraged by the peace officers of the five counties in the trouble zone, Poinsett, Mississippi, Craighead, Cross, and Crittenden. (April 19, 1935, issue.)

There [Marked Tree, Ark.] on March 25 a band of forty-odd masked night riders fired upon the home of C. T. Carpenter, attorney for the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and an old-time southern Democrat whose father fought with Gen. Robert E. Lee in the Army of the Confederacy. The raid upon Mr. Carpenter's home was the climax to a series of similar attacks upon the homes of Negro members of the Union. (April 16, 1935, issue.)

The S.T.F.U. described the situation in its official organ, in more extravagant terms:

⁷⁹Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 2, September 1935 (p. 5); Washington Sunday Star, May 19, 1935 (p. B-2).

⁸⁰Early in 1935, for instance, a Church Emergency Relief Committee, organized throughout the United States, contributed hundreds of dollars as well as clothing to the S.T.F.U. (Sharecroppers Voice, Organ of the S.T.F.U., Memphis, Tenn., Vol. I, No. 1, April 1935, p. 3.) Early in 1936 this committee, headed by Rev. James Myers, industrial secretary of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ, supplied funds to erect a tent colony for 105 evicted sharecroppers near Parkin, Ark. (Idem, February 1, 1936, p. 2.)

⁸¹Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 2, September 1935 (p. 5.)

⁸²Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), November 22, 1934 (p. 4.)

In northeastern Arkansas a reign of terror has been inaugurated by an illegal minority of Ku Kluxers and Vigilantes. Democracy—if there ever was any—has utterly disappeared. Innocent men, women, and children have been assaulted, mobbed and beaten with pistols, clubs and flashlights. Officers, members, and friends of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union have been illegally arrested and jailed. Homes and churches have been riddled with bullets. Whole families have been driven from their homes. Men and women have been shot. Every act on the calendar of terrorism has been practised against the members of the union. Starvation, eviction, attempted lynchings, death threats, attempted murders. (*Sharecroppers' Voice*, Vol. I, No. 1, April 1935, p. 4.)

Daniels explained that the violence was due to two facts—the extreme conservatism of the communities involved, and the disproportionate number of Negroes in the plantation areas.

The average white planter and public official is firmly convinced that unless he takes drastic steps, white supremacy, Christianity, the American flag, and the sanctity of the home and family ties will be overthrown by agents of the Soviet Union. Every stranger who visits * * * the section is looked upon with suspicion, and to express sympathy for the sharecroppers is to invite trouble. (*New York Times*, April 15, 1936.)

Another writer, in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* of June 6, 1936, explained:

The harsh measures resorted to by the planters are readily understandable to anyone on the ground. Planters who live in isolated spots with their families, often vastly outnumbered by the Negroes, fear the social results which they think might ensue when "outside agitators" interfere with their Negroes and put ideas in their heads.

Diversity of status and attitudes among the members limited the Southern Tenant Farmers Union's effectiveness as an organization designed for collective bargaining and strikes. As many of its critics pointed out, a union including wage workers as well as sharecroppers and other tenants implied some conflict of interests. A sharecropper or tenant not infrequently had to pay part of the labor costs for pickers or choppers employed on his tract or on cotton which he shared.

Strikes carried out by the S.T.F.U. were therefore only partially effective and generally involved only a small part of the membership. The first union-led strike was called in the fall of 1935 at the height of the cotton-picking season and was limited to a few counties in which the S.T.F.U. was strongly organized. It followed a similar strike called by the Sharecroppers Union of Alabama in August, and was designed to enforce a wage of 65 cents per hundredweight in place of the prevailing 30 to 35 cents.⁸³

Few details are available regarding the completeness of the strike, as it was a "stay-in" (or labor boycott) in which the workers collectively refrained from going into the fields to pick cotton. Union spokesmen claimed that a poll among its members showed 11,186 in favor of striking and only 450 against.⁸⁴ Only the day laborers were included in the strike, but they numbered some 4,000, according to the *Sharecroppers' Voice* of November 1935. Sharecroppers and tenants were instructed to pick their own cotton so that their supervisors would have to stay in the fields.⁸⁵

Union spokesmen claimed that the strike was "more successful than even the membership had thought possible. Not only the members of the

⁸³*Sharecroppers' Voice*, Vol. I, No. 7, October 1935 (p. 2).

⁸⁴*Idem*, September 1935 (p. 2).

⁸⁵*Memphis Press Scimitar*, October 1, 1935; *Rural Worker*, Vol. I, No. 4, October 1935 (p. 5).

S.T.F.U. left the fields; but nearly all cotton picking stopped for about 10 days."⁸⁶ State Employment Service officials disputed these claims. They asserted that the strike was ineffective and that no labor shortage was felt.⁸⁷ The union's efforts were to some degree neutralized, S.T.F.U. spokesmen admitted, when relief authorities in Shelby County, Tenn., cut 4,500 clients off the rolls and thereby indirectly forced them to pick cotton.⁸⁸ H. L. Mitchell, executive secretary, instructed pickers not to return to work on plantations where they were offered less than 60 cents per hundredweight, but these instructions were not generally followed after the strike was discontinued. The union later claimed as a partial victory a 50-percent increase in picking rates in a few areas of northeast Arkansas affected by the strike.⁸⁹ Even these claims, however, were doubtful.

The Southern Tenant Farmers Union grew rapidly, despite suppression of its activities and its limited effectiveness for collective bargaining and strikes. Continued publicity and support from organizations in other States enhanced its prestige. The A.F. of L. at its annual convention at Atlantic City, N. J., on October 17, 1935, unanimously adopted a resolution endorsing the organization.

The S.T.F.U. held its second annual convention in Little Rock, Ark., in January 1936. H. L. Mitchell reported that during the preceding year the membership had grown from 2,500 to 25,000. New locals had been formed in Oklahoma and the west Texas plains, where tractor farming and employment of Negro, white, and Mexican wage labor were the rule. The convention passed resolutions endorsing the conference of rural workers' unions held in Washington, D. C., under the sponsorship of the National Committee of Agricultural Workers, and opposing the widespread relief practice of using urban unemployed to do farm work. One resolution called upon the United States Government to buy or take over idle farm lands and lease them to displaced tenants.⁹⁰

Pressure from the S.T.F.U. and the Sharecroppers Union of Alabama and their sympathizers brought a new and more favorable cotton contract announced by the Federal Government early in 1936. The proportion of rental payments going to sharecroppers was increased from \$15 to \$25 out of every \$100 total benefit to farm units.⁹¹ More important for the protection of tenants was the provision that, except in special cases, payments were to be made directly to the beneficiaries.⁹²

In the long run, however, this provision weakened the position of sharecroppers and hastened their displacement. Sharecroppers previously had at least some tenure even at a decreased income, but now the planter had a direct incentive to replace them by day laborers in order to have title to all benefit payments. This led to a new wave of evictions during 1936.

One eviction case in February 1936 brought the S.T.F.U. a great deal of publicity. Organized sharecroppers on one large plantation near Parkin (Cross County) forced their landlord to go through legal forms

⁸⁶History of the S.T.F.U. (p. 4).

⁸⁷Memphis Press Scimitar, October 1, 1935.

⁸⁸Sharecroppers' Voice, Vol. I, No. 6, September 1935 (p. 1).

⁸⁹Idem, Vol. I, No. 8, November 1935 (p. 5); Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 3, October 1935 (p. 1).

⁹⁰Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 6, January 1936 (p. 1).

⁹¹Sharecroppers' Voice, Vol. I, No. 11, January 1936 (p. 2).

⁹²Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 5, December 1935 (p. 1); Oklahoma Union Farmer, Oklahoma City, January 1, 1936 (p. 1).

and call upon the sheriff to remove them by law. Relief funds were raised by sympathizers, and the sharecroppers were moved to Parkin. State and county administrators of the Resettlement Administration, according to spokesmen of the S.T.F.U., prevented the evicted families from obtaining land to reestablish themselves. Dr. Sherwood Eddy, national secretary of the Y.M.C.A., raised money from sympathetic organizations and established the much-publicized Delta Cooperative Farm near Hillhouse, Miss. The evicted sharecroppers were placed on the land to work cooperatively and share in the output.⁹³

The S.T.F.U. attempted collective bargaining again in May 1936, when it called a general strike of cotton choppers, including tenants, croppers, and day laborers. The strike received considerable public attention, because of the violence with which it was suppressed rather than because of any great measure of effectiveness in winning union demands.

The acreage-adjustment program of the AAA and the great reduction in the numbers of sharecroppers had resulted in greater use of day labor during the busy seasons of cotton picking in the fall and chopping in the spring. Cotton choppers were being paid 75 cents per day at the time the strike was called. The union at first demanded \$1.50 per day for 10 hours or 15 cents per hour but later announced a willingness to accept \$1 per day, or 10 cents per hour.⁹⁴

Preparations were made several weeks in advance. It was rumored that croppers had quietly stored food in anticipation of the event and had pressed planters for all the "furnish" they could obtain.⁹⁵ The strike was called, union officials claimed, after members in Cross, Crittenden, and St. Francis Counties had voted 6,000 for and 384 against it.⁹⁵ Originally planned for these three counties, it spread to two others in which the S.T.F.U. was organized.⁹⁵ The repercussions were felt even in sections of Mississippi and Missouri, where numerous spontaneous local strikes were reported to have broken out.⁹⁶ Members of the Workers Alliance of Memphis, Tenn., aided the S.T.F.U. in picketing against the employment of urban jobless on the plantations. At one bridge they were reported to have stopped 700 strikebreakers and 400 trucks.⁹⁷

⁹³History of the S.T.F.U. (p. 5).

The cooperative started in 1936 on 2,000 acres, only 400 of which could be put into cultivation. In 1937 it was forced to reduce the number of tenants, because it was unable to support all the families. Another farm was developed near Greenwood, Miss., to take care of extras. At the present time (December 1940) there are only about 12 families on the Hillhouse tract.

The method of operating the farm has been changed also. In the beginning it was collective farming; the members farmed the whole tract and owned livestock and equipment in common. This had to be modified, however, and a more plantationlike mode of operation was adopted. Each tenant was given his own piece of land to cultivate, because it was found that when they tried to work the land in common, some did not do their part.

Each tenant is encouraged to raise his own livestock and garden produce. The cotton crop is handled on a traditional sharecropper arrangement; the tenant gets half, and the farm gets half which goes to pay interest on loans, expenses, etc. If anything is left over it either goes back to the tenants as a bonus or is put in reserve, whichever the membership chooses by vote.

The cooperative store and medical clinic have been a success in a small way because they serve the community outside the farm as well.

⁹⁴Federal Council of Churches of Christ: *The Cotton Choppers Strike in Arkansas* (p. 2).

⁹⁵Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 11, June 1936 (pp. 1 and 4).

⁹⁶Sharecroppers' Voice, July 1936 (p. 3).

⁹⁷Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 11, June 1936 (p. 1).

David Benson, an organizer for the S.T.F.U. who was "loaned" by the Workers Alliance, was subsequently arrested for driving a car in Arkansas with a "foreign license" (i.e., Washington, D. C.). In his trial he was convicted of "interfering with labor," under a law intended to safeguard the planter by keeping other planters from "stealing his labor" or enticing his sharecroppers away. A verdict of guilty was returned by the jury, with maximum penalties of \$1,000 for two instances of interfering with labor, and \$10 and \$50, respectively, for being without Arkansas automobile plates or driver's license. The Federal Council of Churches of Christ reported several threats to lynch the prisoner. After the trial, the defendant's lawyer was surrounded by a crowd and ordered to leave town. The lawyer's driver, Clay East, a union official, was beaten by a crowd and then arrested "for his own good," and later given safe escort to the Tennessee line by State troopers. (*Federal Council of Churches of Christ, The Cotton Choppers Strike in Arkansas*, pp. 4-5.)

The strike, nevertheless, had only limited effect. Union spokesmen complained about adverse changes in the weather. Unusual dryness discouraged the growth of grass and weeds, so that the struggle was drawn out longer than had been anticipated.⁹⁸ The S.T.F.U. reported substantial gains in some sections and claimed to have signed contracts with seven small planters in Crittenden County.⁹⁹ Reports from nonunion sources, however, indicated that the strike was not so widespread as was generally believed. Local union officials claimed that 4,000 had participated. More conservative estimates put the figure at 2,000.¹ Some observers estimated that there were only a few hundred. Harry Malcolm, State Deputy Labor Commissioner, who was sent into the area to investigate, found few strikers and concluded that the "stay-in" was far from complete.²

After several weeks the executive council of the S.T.F.U. declared the strike at an end. Spokesmen claimed that wages for farm laborers were raised in many localities; it was reported that in some cases \$1.25 per day was being paid instead of the previous 65-to-75-cent scale, while in others "thousands" had won \$1 per day. Later analysis by sympathetic observers, however, indicated that the strike had been broken. Only a number of smaller farms raised day wages to \$1. The failure to win concessions from the larger plantations was blamed on widespread violence and intimidation by planters and local authorities, as well as on Governor Futrell's sending the State Rangers and Militia to the scene. The Governor was reported to have made a "personal investigation of the east Arkansas situation," and declared the controversy "much ado about nothing." In a later statement to the press he said that "agitators" were responsible for the troubles, adding that he had "chopped cotton many a day for 50 cents and dinner without complaining."³

The violence of planters in crushing the strike brought it publicity out of all proportion to its importance. News reporters and investigators poured into the trouble area. The drama of cotton choppers marching in groups of one hundred or more in demonstrations designed to spread the strike was recorded in the "March of Time," and the conflict became widely known.⁴

The strike focussed special attention on the issue of peonage. The St. Louis Post Dispatch and other papers had published several articles describing the convict-leasing system practised in eastern Arkansas. Landowners in Cross, Crittenden, and St. Francis Counties often made contracts with the county courts to obtain the services of prisoners in return for paying the cost of their trials.⁵ Several Negro members of the S.T.F.U. during the cotton choppers' strike were put to work on farms after perfunctory "trials" at which they were convicted of vagrancy. Others were arrested, warned to go to work, and released when they agreed to do so. Paul Peacher, town marshal of Earle, Ark., was arrested by the U. S. Department of Justice on charges of peonage. One

⁹⁸The effectiveness of a cotton choppers' strike lies in the potential damage to the crops. In the spring the young cotton plants must be thinned, and if weeds and grass are not removed they will quickly choke and kill the plants.

⁹⁹Press Release of S.T.F.U. (Memphis), April 28, 1936.

¹Federal Council of Churches of Christ, *op. cit.* (p. 2).

²Oren Stephens: *Revolt on the Delta*, in *Harpers*, November 1941 (p. 657).

³Arkansas Democrat, June 5, 1936; Federal Council of Churches of Christ, *The Cotton Choppers Strike in Arkansas* (p. 6).

⁴The tactics of the marching picket line evidently did much to arouse violence. The union claimed great effectiveness for this method, stating that one area of 20 miles square was left vacant of field workers. Spokesmen of the planters claimed that many struck because of their fear that pickets would deal forcefully with them. Union spokesmen, on the other hand, claimed that this was a common excuse given by strikers in order to get their jobs back. In contradiction to the planters, they claimed that many more would have joined the strike but for the fear of eviction and physical violence at the hands of planters and their agents.

⁵Arkansas Democrat, June 7, 1935 (p. 1).

of the S.T.F.U.'s marches of pickets, starting at Earle, had been broken up by a mob led by Peacher. He arrested 13 union strikers and put them to work on his own farm. He was later convicted in the United States Federal Court, fined \$3,500, and sentenced to 2 years in the penitentiary.⁶

Numerous outbreaks of violence accompanied the strike. A union meeting in Earle was reported broken up by "armed and drunken" planters, and members of the union were severely beaten. One Negro named Frank Weems was rumored to have been beaten to death. When Claude Williams, ex-preacher and vice president of the S.T.F.U., along with a social worker from Memphis arrived to investigate Weems' disappearance, they were flogged by a group of planters, they claimed.⁷ This incident brought headlines in newspapers throughout the country and editorials both mild and strong; a photograph of the victims appeared in Time magazine. The Earle Enterprise played down the incident:

The greatest hue and cry arises from the fact that a white woman was forced to endure the indignity of a light whipping. * * * Opinions vary as to the wisdom of this act. It is hard for us to condone the action. However, there is no doubt but what the woman was completely out of her place. Assisting in conducting a Negro's funeral is no place for a white woman in the South. (Oren Stephens, op. cit., p. 656.)

The New York Post, on the other hand, condemned the action, concluding one editorial with the observation that "there can be no doubt of the reversion to slave law, mob violence, and Fascist methods in Arkansas."⁸ One observer pictured the whole strike situation in broader terms:

* * * rioting, night-riding, tar-and-feathering, flogging, exhorting, preaching, protesting, whitewashing, arguing. If there was no general strike there was general turmoil, and it was lamentable that there was plenty of justification for the positions of both owners and non-owners, though neither side could see the justice of the other.⁹

The cotton choppers' strike of 1936 was a failure as an instrument of collective bargaining with planters. The unfavorable attention which it focussed on the law-enforcement agencies in Arkansas, however, prevented further use of extralegal tactics of suppression. No organized violence or terror was used against the S.T.F.U. in Arkansas after 1936.⁹

EXPANSION DURING 1936-37

Wage levels rose in the east Arkansas cotton-plantation area during 1936 and 1937 as a result partly of the cotton choppers' strike and partly of a relative labor scarcity during a temporary period of prosperity. The rates for cotton picking in the fall of 1936 rose generally to \$1 per hundredweight, and in a few areas reached \$1.25. These wage gains were

⁶Commercial Appeal (Memphis), April 20, 1937 (p. 4).

⁷Sharecroppers' Voice, July 1936 (p. 3).

⁸Oren Stephens, op. cit. (pp. 657, 658).

⁹Isolated instances of violence, however, continued to occur from time to time in Arkansas. The Workers Defense League in May 1939 claimed that an armed mob prevented the S.T.F.U. from holding a meeting in Crawfordville. A week before this three organizers were reported beaten. (Last Minute News, Workers Defense League, New York, May 18, 1939, p. 1.)

A Negro S.T.F.U. organizer in Noxubee County, Miss., was reported beaten and warned to leave the county under threat of death. He had gone previously to the county agent's office to find out the date of election for officers to the county committee administering the acreage-reduction program. This act was in defiance of the planters' opposition to Negroes' voting. (Press Scimitar, Memphis, November 28, 1939.)

After some pressure from the S.T.F.U., the U. S. Department of Agriculture was reported to be probing charges of such threats against tenants, which prevented them from participating in the administration of the AAA program. (Nashville Banner, November 29, 1939.)

maintained during the following year, and strikes and open conflict subsided. Grower-employers and businessmen now sought alternative labor supplies.

The agricultural committee of the Memphis Chamber of Commerce campaigned for curtailment of WPA work and elimination of direct relief for a period of 10 weeks in order to relieve the current "labor shortage" on Arkansas cotton plantations.¹⁰ Col. H. S. Berry, State WPA Director, declared this an "ill-advised answer to Arkansas cotton-picking problems, at least until the 29,000 WPA workers in Arkansas have first been sent to the cotton fields."¹¹

The S.T.F.U. continued to grow rapidly in membership now that it was free from molestation. By January 1, 1937, the official membership report listed no less than 328 locals and claimed 30,827 members in seven Southern States.¹² This represented the peak of the union's size and strength. From then on, it apparently declined in membership. The organization centered in the Delta plantation counties near Memphis, where the S.T.F.U. maintained its offices. Scattered locals in other States were soon found to be too difficult to "service."

S.T.F.U. units in the hill sections of Tennessee and Arkansas, and in Oklahoma and Texas to the west, were made up of farm members quite different in character from the Delta plantation sharecropper. Small-farm owners were much more numerous in the former regions, while sharecroppers and tenants were individual entrepreneurs who, in contrast to their plantation prototypes, usually operated separate farms without direct supervision. Both groups had common interests arising from the problems of displacement from eviction, drought, mechanization, and Government crop control. It was primarily in the Arkansas Delta area that the S.T.F.U. was directly concerned with wage levels, benefit payments, and contracts with landlords; in that region plantation sharecroppers at any time might be dispossessed and reemployed as wage hands. Cotton-growing areas of Texas and Oklahoma, on the other hand, had long depended upon nonresident seasonal labor recruited from Mexican workers migrating north from the Rio Grande Valley. Displaced small farmers tended to migrate to more distant places such as Arizona and California, to be employed as casual agricultural wage laborers.

¹⁰Commercial Appeal (Memphis), September 8, 1936.

¹¹Chattanooga Times, September 13, 1936.

¹²Following data and remainder of section are from Proceedings, Third Annual Convention, Southern Tenant Farmers Union, Muskogee, Okla., January 14-17, 1937 (pp. 24, 59-62, 68-79).

	<i>Number of locals</i>	<i>Enrolled membership</i>
Texas	8	480
Mississippi	8	988
Tennessee	3	565
Missouri	20	1,373
North Carolina	1	10
Oklahoma	76	8,595
Arkansas:		
Crittenden County	36	2,487
Cross County	28	2,641
Jefferson County	24	1,360
Poinsett County	17	1,840
St. Francis County	51	4,457
Woodruff County	9	421
Miscellaneous counties	47	5,610
	328	30,827

The differences in attitude and interest were demonstrated at the third annual convention of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union at Muskogee, Okla., during January 1937. Delegates from Oklahoma and Texas voted to amend the union constitution so as to include "small farmers who do not employ steady help" among those eligible for membership. Claude Williams and H. L. Mitchell, among other officers of the S.T.F.U., opposed this move and voted to keep the S.T.F.U. primarily a labor organization. They maintained that small farmers should be left to organizations like the Farmers Educational and Cooperative Union. If they were included officially in the S.T.F.U., this organization would lose its standing and recognition with the American Federation of Labor.

More than a year's experience with collective action, however, had indicated that orthodox labor-union tactics were unsuitable for sharecroppers. Two large strikes and several small ones had failed to win collective-bargaining agreements granting union recognition or economic gains in the form of increased wages or crop shares. Cotton plantations themselves were having to be subsidized continually by Government benefit payments. Tenants and sharecroppers were being displaced in growing numbers by mechanization and crop-reduction programs, and any temporary gains won for tenants at the expense of planters only accelerated the process. Hence, the bargaining power of cotton wage laborers was being weakened through continuous additions of ex-sharecroppers to their ranks.

The S.T.F.U. thus could gain more for its members by acting as a pressure group seeking Government policies of benefit to tenants and sharecroppers. It could serve also as a semiofficial administrative body, which would cooperate with Government agencies in order to insure effective application of such policies, where opposition from planters and local officials was likely to arise.

The executive secretary's report to the third annual convention indicated that the S.T.F.U. was already an educational body and pressure group rather than an orthodox union. Its major gains had been won through publicity, new legislation, and strict enforcement of the law, rather than through collective bargaining and strikes. Like the Farmers Union in other States, the S.T.F.U. began to form cooperatives, most of them in the form of "buying clubs" which could obtain necessities at prices lower than plantation commissaries customarily charged. The Resettlement Administration helped the union establish a series of classes in consumers' cooperation, and plans were made to employ a full-time educational director to aid locals in this program.

The S.T.F.U. won more important concrete gains as a defense agency for organizations attempting to protect the legal rights of tenants and laborers. The union showed remarkable prowess in mobilizing public opinion and support to defend members arrested on various charges. Pressure was exerted on the higher courts to declare unconstitutional such laws as the Arkansas statute prohibiting the "enticement of labor" and a Tennessee law regarding "vagrancy." The successful prosecution of Paul Peacher, town marshal of Earle, Ark., was the beginning of the union's offensive against extralegal tactics of combat used by planters. It made plans to bring several flogging cases into Federal courts, which were considered more impartial than local or State bodies. It also reported winning numerous suits brought before the State Bureau of Labor

in Arkansas, involving sharecroppers' claims against planters for unpaid wages, crop shares, and benefit payments.¹³

The S.T.F.U.'s success rested largely on support from other States in the form of publicity and funds to finance its defense activities. Organized sharecroppers received substantial aid from such agencies as the American Civil Liberties Union, the Workers Defense League of the Socialist Party, and the National Committee of Rural Social Planning.

The major backing of the S.T.F.U. was from organizations which were concerned primarily with the broad labor movement. The union's objectives and policies consequently tended to reflect the interests of wage earners rather than farm operators, in so far as these could be considered distinct groups in the South. The small operators' point of view was expressed at the convention in resolutions endorsing such measures as the extension of producers' and consumers' cooperatives; written contracts between tenants and landlords; elimination of discriminatory practices against S.T.F.U. members by the administrators of Resettlement Administration farms; direct payment of Government subsidies to tenants and sharecroppers; a more liberal policy of Federal Government home loans and crop loans to poor farmers; and the passage of a new homestead law providing that "all actual tillers of the soil be guaranteed possession of the land, either as working farm families or cooperative associations of such farm families, so long as they occupy and use the land." Labor objectives were incorporated in the more-numerous resolutions urging such measures as the transfer of jurisdiction in handling the problems of farm workers from the U. S. Department of Agriculture to a special branch of the U. S. Department of Labor; amendment of the Social Security Act to include "all who need its benefits, whether they be industrial, farm, domestic, or civil employees, or are otherwise employed, and regardless of the number working in their place of employment"; a "pledge of solidarity" with "class war prisoners" like Tom Mooney, Warren K. Billings, J. B. McNamara, and Angelo Herndon; an amendment to the Wagner Labor Relations Act providing specifically for the inclusion of agricultural laborers and sharecroppers under its benefits; higher wages and a 10-hour day for agricultural workers whether employed in cotton fields or in cultivation and harvesting of other farm products; and, finally, a general federation of agricultural workers. On the last point, the executive council of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union was instructed to "take such steps as will lead to the formation of such a federation, securing the advice and endorsement of representatives of the organized industrial workers and organizations."¹⁴

Affiliation with U.C.A.P.A.W.A.

The S.T.F.U. took tentative steps to affiliate with other organizations of agricultural workers in the United States. Local unions were being chartered by the A.F. of L. and federated on State-wide bases in numerous regions. Conferences had been held during 1935 and 1936 with executive members of the National Committee to Aid Agricultural Workers, as

¹³The report of the Arkansas Bureau of Labor for 1934-36 stated that that agency "has handled more than 600 cases of complaints of sharecroppers against landlords, and has been reasonably successful in making collections, and otherwise making adjustments in these cases. It has been expedient to file suits in but few cases, due to lack of a sufficient number of assistants to make the proper investigations and plead suits."

¹⁴Proceedings of Third Annual Convention, Southern Tenant Farmers Union, Muskogee, Okla., January 14-17, 1937 (p. 39).

well as with the Sharecroppers Union of Alabama and Louisiana, for the purpose of coordinating farm labor union policy over wider areas of the South. The S.T.F.U. late in 1936 made preparations to join A.F. of L. and independent farm laborers' unions in one nation-wide federation for agriculture.

However, the S.T.F.U. and other farm organizations were drawn to the Committee for Industrial Organization early in 1937. Industrial unions affiliated to the C.I.O. had been supporting the S.T.F.U., because their members were continually menaced by competition from poorly paid rural groups in the South. One speaker at the S.T.F.U. convention in January 1937 had predicted that "if he [John L. Lewis] succeeds in organizing the steel workers and the auto workers, etc., he will turn his attention to the rural workers. * * * Mr. Lewis may be willing to help us with men, power, and funds, when his industrial union drive is firmly established."¹⁴

The S.T.F.U. subsequently joined the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America of the C.I.O. when it was established at Denver in July 1937. Spokesmen of the S.T.F.U. later claimed that this move was based upon a promise that their union would have autonomy within the U.C.A.P.A.W.A., and that it would be allowed to carry on much as it had been doing, without changing its name, its policies, or its program.¹⁵

Important achievements were asserted by the S.T.F.U. during its period of affiliation with the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Several thousand new members were claimed in the executive secretary's official report to the 1938 convention of the union. Although it had lost the few locals previously established in Texas and North Carolina, new ones had been organized in other States. Altogether the S.T.F.U. claimed 305 locals with 35,684 members in Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Although still operating under S.T.F.U. charters, 127 locals remained unaffiliated with the U.C.A.P.A.W.A.¹⁶

¹⁴Proceedings of Third Annual Convention, Southern Tenant Farmers Union, Muskogee, Okla., January 14-17, 1937 (p. 39).

¹⁵History of the S.T.F.U. (p. 7).

¹⁶The membership, as shown by the executive secretary's report to the 1938 convention, was distributed by States as follows:

	<i>Number of locals</i> 305	<i>Enrolled membership</i> 35,684
Total, Southern Tenant Farmers Union.....	305	35,684
Arkansas: Total	182	22,676
In good standing	102	14,876
Active but not in good standing.....	32	3,600
Unaffiliated with U.C.A.P.A.W.A.	48	4,200
Missouri: Total	29	4,662
In good standing	21	3,862
Active but not in good standing.....	0	0
Unaffiliated with U.C.A.P.A.W.A.	8	800
Oklahoma: Total	61	6,727
In good standing	17	1,702
Active but not in good standing.....	1	25
Unaffiliated with U.C.A.P.A.W.A.	43	5,000
Mississippi, Tennessee: Total.....	17	1,619
In good standing	6	567
Active but not in good standing.....	1	52
Unaffiliated with U.C.A.P.A.W.A.	10	1,000

Only a small proportion of these members paid their dues regularly. Even before the union affiliated with the C.I.O., when dues were 10 cents per month, an average of only 2,600 out of an enrolled membership of 30,000 regularly paid dues during the first 6 months of 1936. (Sharecroppers' Voice, September 1936, p. 2.)

The explanation for the large number of S.T.F.U. locals listed as active but not in good standing or unaffiliated with U.C.A.P.A.W.A. rested on the increase in dues required in the reorganization. In 1937, when the S.T.F.U. was independent and unaffiliated, membership dues were 10 cents per month or \$1 per year, and initiation fees were 25 cents per person. The dues for the U.C.A.P.A.W.A., on the other hand, were 50 cents per person per month, which may have served to keep many poorly paid members out of the organization.

The S.T.F.U. continued to function more effectively as a pressure group than as a full-fledged labor union, despite its new affiliations. It claimed to have won further legislative measures beneficial to sharecroppers and a more stringent enforcement of legislation previously passed.¹⁷

Greater official status also was accorded the S.T.F.U. "This year," the secretary reported, "has been a banner year in the history of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union as far as recognition by governmental agencies is concerned." The union devoted more attention to direct political action, and in Oklahoma, Missouri, and Arkansas it was active in primary and general elections for county and State offices.¹⁸

As part of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A., the S.T.F.U. cooperated closely with other labor groups in problems of common interest. It planned to work as an "advance guard for the C.I.O. in all parts of the South." It helped the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union organize locals in small towns and rural areas, and it recruited members in "runaway" garment plants and shoe factories, in anticipation of organizing drives by the United Shoe Workers and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. Its defense activities continued to be carried out largely through its affiliations with the Workers Defense League and the legal department of the C.I.O. The S.T.F.U. also reported handling thousands of dollars of sharecroppers' and tenants' claims against planters through agencies of the State Labor Department and U. S. Department of Agriculture.¹⁹

STRIKE OF 1938

Wide publicity again attended the S.T.F.U. when it led a general strike of cotton pickers in 1938. The union in September called a "stay out of the fields" strike, in an effort to win a standard rate of \$1 per hundredweight.²⁰ The action came too late in the season to be effective in some sections because of a short crop, but in other localities it was considered a success. Thousands of nonunion pickers as well as union members were reported on strike for a week or 10 days. Union spokesmen claimed that 6,500 pickers in Missouri and Arkansas participated in the movement at its peak.²¹ It ended by the first week of October with

¹⁷The union spokesmen claimed an important influence on the provisions of the 1938 and 1939 farm bills passed in Congress. All farmers raising less than 5 acres in cotton were freed of legal restrictions on output. The proportion of benefit payments to sharecroppers and tenants was increased to the same proportion as their share in the crops, thus entitling them to 50-percent payments instead of the 12½ percent guaranteed before. This provision in the farm bill, it was claimed, added several hundred thousand dollars to the incomes of sharecroppers and tenants. The S.T.F.U. was also partly responsible for preventing an attempt by a group of Delta planters to draft a "model contract," changing the shares of tenants and sharecroppers respectively to 60 percent and 40 percent of the proceeds of the crop, in place of the customary 75 percent and 50 percent. The U. S. Department of Agriculture issued rules and regulations stating that the status of tenants and sharecroppers could not be changed by planters who wished to receive benefit payments. (Official Report of the S.T.F.U., p. 1.)

¹⁸From Official Report of the S.T.F.U. (pp. 2-3).

Rev. Howard Kester testified before Senate Committees studying the relief needs of the South, and the union secretary (H. L. Mitchell) was one of 22 southerners called to Washington to aid in drafting the Report to the President on Economic Conditions in the South.

Sharecroppers, tenants, and farm laborers in Oklahoma and Missouri are qualified to vote, as there is no poll tax to disfranchise either Negroes or whites. The union urged members in Arkansas to pay their poll tax and work quietly for repeal of the law. Between 4 and 5 thousand members, it was claimed, qualified and voted. In some counties of east Arkansas Negroes were permitted to vote for the first time since 1870.

¹⁹Idem (pp. 5, 6, 8).

²⁰The strike was termed a "sit-down strike" by newspapers because the pickers were told to sit down in their homes and wait for the ensuing labor shortage to force a rise in wage scales.

²¹Accurate estimates of the number involved were exceedingly difficult to obtain in this strike, as new walk-outs were taking place in some sections while in others pickers were returning to work.

substantial gain to the union, according to its officers. Pickers in several counties in Arkansas were reported returning to work at wages of 85 to 90 cents per hundredweight when transportation was furnished, and \$1 per hundredweight when it was not furnished. Secretary H. L. Mitchell stated that from 18,000 to 20,000 cotton pickers won wage increases of from 5 to 25 cents per hundredweight as a result of the strike. According to his official report, "at least \$200,000 was added to the income of the members of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union by this action alone." Planters and their spokesmen, on the other hand, claimed that the strike was ineffective because 65 percent of the cotton crop in the chief east Arkansas counties had already been harvested.²²

Force and intimidation on the part of planters or local authorities were notably absent during the strike. This fact in itself was testimony to the effectiveness of the organized defense activities carried on by the S.T.F.U. and its sympathizers. Only eight persons were arrested, mostly on minor charges, and all but three were soon released.²³

THE MISSOURI DEMONSTRATION

The most dramatic incident associated with the S.T.F.U. occurred in southeast Missouri during January 1939, when about 1,300 evicted sharecroppers camped with their meager belongings along a main highway. The extensive publicity accompanying this affair was of great benefit to the S.T.F.U. and the U.C.A.P.A.W.A.

The demonstration resulted from an unprecedented number of eviction notices issued by planters who wished to retain all Government crop-reduction benefit payments.²⁴ Sharecroppers who had received notices held a meeting in Sikeston, Mo., on January 6 and decided against an aimless migration into already overcrowded cities and towns. More than 1,000 croppers under the leadership of the Rev. Owen Whitfield, Negro vice president of the S.T.F.U., moved onto U. S. Highways 60 and 61 and camped there for more than a week. The Southern Tenant Farmers Union sent donations, borrowed money, and sent spokesmen to seek help from the Government. Organizers of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. formed a Committee for the Rehabilitation of Sharecroppers, in St. Louis, Mo., and mobilized support from many quarters. Labor unions in Washington, D. C., pressed the Federal Government agencies to provide emergency relief for the demonstrators. The National Guard in Missouri was ordered to provide tents and blankets.²⁵

²²Commercial Appeal (Memphis), September 27 and 28, 1938: Report of executive secretary of S.T.F.U., 1938 (p. 4).

²³Two were arrested in Missouri on charges of disturbing the peace, as well as assault and battery, but they were cleared without cost to the union. Two men were arrested and charged with burning a barn, but these were soon released. Three other union members were sentenced on charges of conspiracy and "night riding" in Osceola, Ark. They were temporarily released on bonds posted by the Workers Defense League of New York City, while their cases were appealed to the Arkansas Supreme Court. Subsequently, their prison sentence was affirmed. The charge arose from their action in posting a strike bulletin with the scribbled caption, "Stay out of the field if you don't want to get into trouble." This was construed as a threat and brought the strike notice under the 1909 "night-riding" statute of Arkansas. (Baltimore Sun, Mar. 14, 1939: Report of executive secretary of S.T.F.U., 1938, pp. 4, 5.)

²⁴St. Louis Post Dispatch, January 19, 1939.

According to a writer in the Post Dispatch of January 10, 1939, the pattern of displacement familiar for several years in eastern Arkansas took place to an unprecedented degree in southeast Missouri. Many eviction notices were issued to sharecroppers at the end of the year because landowners and land operators wanted to keep all the Government crop-reduction payments. As long as they lived on the premises, sharecroppers also shared in the payments, but if the planter could show that he had no croppers and could employ labor at 75 cents a day for the 120-odd days needed, he could receive the total Government payment.

²⁵Official Report of the Secretary, H. L. Mitchell, S.T.F.U. (Memphis), 1939 (p. 3).

The task of distributing relief was complicated when county and State officers broke up the camps, on the ground that they constituted a menace to public health. The embarrassing attention which the demonstrators were attracting was probably a more important consideration. Newspapers reported that evicted croppers were being loaded on trucks and scattered over back country roads.²⁶ Union organizers located most of the families and helped them obtain emergency relief grants from the Farm Security Administration.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation examined the situation and later submitted a report. An interpretation by the Washington (D. C.) Times of March 13, 1939, stated:

The January demonstration in southeast Missouri was a planned protest against economic conditions of sordidness and poverty which were aggravated by the Federal farm and relief programs. * * * The FBI sustained the complaints of demonstrators that they lived in unsatisfactory surroundings and received hardly the bare necessities of life. But it absolved landlords of charges of persecution.

A number of the evicted families later bought a 93-acre tract of land and lived in temporary log cabins on emergency relief rations.²⁷ Finally they were placed on a rehabilitation project under the supervision of the Farm Security Administration.

S.T.F.U.-U.C.A.P.A.W.A. CONFLICT

The Missouri roadside demonstration, though it was an important means of enlisting public support for organized sharecroppers, brought to a head a growing dissension between the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and the central executive of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. The differences were due in part to the sectional interests of the S.T.F.U. Its officials had been with the union from its beginning and wished to carry on their functions autonomously, as they had been doing for years. The majority of members apparently preferred to pay dues and act through their own elected officers.²⁸ H. L. Mitchell claimed that the S.T.F.U. had entered the C.I.O. only on the promise that it would be allowed autonomy, and that the agreement had been violated repeatedly. On the other hand, the national executive of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in Washington, D. C., was endeavoring to mold the international into a highly centralized federation of agricultural and allied unions. Donald Henderson, president of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A., sought to have per capita dues paid directly to the international treasury instead of to the S.T.F.U.²⁹

An open break was forestalled for a time by a compromise arrangement that apparently left the boundaries of jurisdiction between the S.T.F.U. and the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. national executive far from clear. It was claimed that the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was attempting to "swallow up the S.T.F.U."³⁰ The latter was able to send only nine delegates to the second annual convention of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in San Francisco, Calif., during December 1938, and their influence was negligible, despite their claim to represent the largest number of locals in the international. They were

²⁶The St. Louis Post Dispatch in its issue of January 19, 1939, reported that "500 Negro sharecroppers who were moved from the highways by State highway patrolmen and dumped on a barren 40-acre tract in the Bird's Point-New Madrid floodway, were moved again today by New Madrid county authorities. Most were being moved to houses that they had left."

²⁷U.C.A.P.A.W.A. News, Vol. I, No. 3, September 1939 (p. 6).

²⁸Official Report, Sixth Annual Convention, S.T.F.U., Memphis, January 6-7, 1940 (p. 1).

²⁹Memphis Press Scimitar, March 20, 1939.

³⁰History of the S.T.F.U. (p. 9).

voted down on numerous proposals, and little attention was paid to their demands for autonomy.³⁰ Delegates to the fifth annual convention of the S.T.F.U. at Cotton Plant, Ark., shortly afterward voted that "officers and members of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union should go about their own S.T.F.U. affairs in their own way, regardless of what U.C.A.-P.A.W.A. leaders want them to do."³⁰

An open breach did not develop until the Missouri demonstration occurred. S.T.F.U. officials accused the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. of seizing upon this incident as an opportunity to force the members of the S.T.F.U. to abandon the old union and join locals affiliated directly to the international. Owen Whitfield had organized the demonstration without notifying the district executive office beforehand. According to H. L. Mitchell, Whitfield then went to the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. headquarters in St. Louis for official support and wired the Memphis office to keep all officers and organizers out of the field. Mitchell charged Donald Henderson with attempting to disrupt and discredit the S.T.F.U. by accusing it of misappropriating relief funds.³¹

Shortly afterward the national office of U.C.A.P.A.W.A. suspended the elected president, vice president, secretary, and members of the executive board of S.T.F.U., in preparation for reorganizing the union as a subsidiary unit of the international. In a press interview S.T.F.U. spokesmen charged "communistic domination" and use of "rule or ruin tactics" by Donald Henderson.³² The U.C.A.P.A.W.A., on the other hand, argued that this step was necessary in order to win adequate cooperation from the southern Cotton Belt administrative district, and to straighten out financial complications that had arisen as a result of the S.T.F.U.'s autonomy.

The S.T.F.U. executive council subsequently claimed that a vote among its locals showed 138 in favor of withdrawing from the U.C.A.-P.A.W.A. and only 2 against. The severance of its affiliation was formally announced on March 11, 1939. At a special convention called in Memphis on March 19, delegates from 112 out of 178 locals in good standing with the S.T.F.U. voted approval of the separation.³²

State conventions of those locals remaining with U.C.A.P.A.W.A., meanwhile, were being held in St. Louis and Memphis in order to reorganize the S.T.F.U. State Agricultural Workers Councils were established in Missouri and other States, and a general reorganizing committee was formed among dissident elements of the S.T.F.U. who disagreed with its autonomous policy. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. attempted to hold a convention in Memphis in opposition to the now separate S.T.F.U. in a move which H. L. Mitchell termed "dual unionism." The S.T.F.U. forestalled this by securing a permanent injunction from the U. S. District Court prohibiting organizers of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. from representing themselves as belonging to the Southern Tenant Farmers Union.³³

³⁰History of the S.T.F.U. (p. 9).

³¹Official Report of the Secretary, 1939 (pp. 2 and 4).

³²Memphis Press Scimitar, March 20, 1939.

³³Idem (p. 8).

The Call, official paper of the Socialist Party, charged that the S.T.F.U.-U.C.A.P.A.W.A. conflict arose from an attempt by the Communist Party to capture the S.T.F.U. and, failing this, to disrupt it. According to this interpretation, the attempt to "capture" the S.T.F.U. failed when Claude Williams, director of Commonwealth College in Mena, Ark., and member of the executive committee of the S.T.F.U., was expelled from the union when he was discovered sending a report to the district Communist Party headquarters. (Case of Claude Williams, and Testimony, Report of Executive Board, S.T.F.U., Memphis, September 16 and 17, 1938.) According to the Call, it was then planned to "capture" the S.T.F.U. by enticing it into the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. by promises of autonomy, then "disfranchising" S.T.F.U. delegates at the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. convention, and later suspending the S.T.F.U. executive in order to seize control of the organization directly. This alleged move also failed, after the majority of locals voted to disaffiliate from the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. and rebuild the independent S.T.F.U. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. then set out to disrupt the S.T.F.U. by organizing a competing dual organization of sharecroppers and day laborers under the same name. (The Call, New York, Mar. 23, 1940, p. 2.)

The split between S.T.F.U. and U.C.A.P.A.W.A. seriously affected the strength of organized tenants and farm laborers in the region, as their loyalties were divided. Each organization, with its separate headquarters and staff of officers, insisted that the other had all but disappeared. Actually, both had fewer members among rural tenants and laborers than they had in previous years. The momentum with which the S.T.F.U., and later the U.C.A.P.A.W.A., had spread through many counties and States had slackened by 1938, and the split hastened the decline. As representatives of rural laborers, both groups utilized their limited funds and personnel to serve as contacts or semi-administrative arms for Government agencies, rather than to maintain and expand their union structures.

Recent Developments

UNITED CANNERY, AGRICULTURAL, PACKING AND ALLIED WORKERS OF AMERICA

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. retained a number of locals after the split and organized new ones in various sections. These were drawn together in skeleton agricultural workers' councils and tenant farmers unions in Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, and Alabama.³⁴ These were joined by the Farmers Union of Louisiana late in 1939 to form the Southern Cotton Council. This latter body established a workers' training school in Memphis for the purpose of recruiting and developing an effective nucleus of indigenous leaders for U.C.A.P.A.W.A. locals and State agricultural workers councils in the Cotton Belt. The school emphasized "a close study of the mechanics of the various governmental farm agencies dealing with agriculture in the Cotton South, and the steps to be taken by the cotton workers in order to secure the benefits available."³⁵

The most important activities of various branches of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in the Cotton Belt were directed toward winning concessions from government agencies. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Tenant Farmers Union in Oklahoma sought to obtain FSA funds to establish cooperative farms for displaced owners and tenants. The Texas Tenant Farmers Union, composed mainly of Negroes in a few eastern cotton counties, attempted to improve conditions in rural schools and to obtain soil conservation checks for its members. The Agricultural Workers Council in Missouri tried to get an FSA rehabilitation project for the several hundred sharecroppers evicted early in 1939. Rev. Owen Whitfield, president of the State U.C.A.P.A.W.A. organization, was a representative on a landlord-sharecropper committee appointed by Governor Stark of Missouri. In each State also the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. sought closer cooperation with the Farmers Union.³⁵

Early in 1940 delegates from these State branches of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. attended a National Cotton Conference in Washington, D.C.,

³⁴In February 1940, the membership of these organizations in a signed statement claimed: "(1) That in the States of Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, and Alabama no other organization or union except affiliates of the C.I.O. has any effective membership or locals composed of sharecroppers, tenants, or day laborers; and (2) that to our knowledge the Southern Tenant Farmers Union has no single local or paid-up members in the States of Oklahoma, Texas, or Alabama, and no effective organization in the States of Arkansas or Missouri." (U.C.A.P.A.W.A. News, February 1940, Vol. I, No. 6, p. 5.)

³⁵U.C.A.P.A.W.A. News, February 1940, Vol. I, No. 6 (p. 5), and July-August 1940, Vol. I, No. 9 (p. 5).

to submit a program for increased financial aid and legal protection from Federal Government agencies.³⁶

Financial stringency soon forced the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in the southern Cotton Belt, as in other rural regions of the United States, to restrict its activities among field workers and tenants. It centered its efforts increasingly upon organizing workers in better-paid urban occupations which came under the jurisdiction of the National Labor Relations Act. The major union gains during 1940 and 1941 were won in processing plants of Memphis. By the late fall of 1940 the United Food Workers Local 4 and United Cotton Workers Local 19 had won NLRB elections in several flour mills, cotton compresses, and cottonseed-oil plants, which gave the union jurisdiction over more than a thousand processing workers. Contracts signed with a few companies granted preferential hiring and seniority privileges.³⁷ Farm workers and tenants' unions, meanwhile, were abandoned in all but a few east Arkansas counties adjoining Memphis, Tenn.

SOUTHERN TENANT FARMERS UNION

The S.T.F.U. continued to function as an independent organization financed in large part by contributions from outside sympathizers. Its Sharecroppers' Week was sponsored annually by several dozen of the most prominent liberals in the United States. Coordinated fund-raising campaigns were carried on in the larger cities, netting the union several thousand dollars each year.³⁸ Direct financial support was provided also by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, of which H. L. Mitchell acted as organizer while still on the executive council of the S.T.F.U. The I.L.G.W.U. was conducting a unionizing drive in the southern textile and garment industry, particularly among "runaway" factories, and felt that the very existence of the S.T.F.U. helped to keep alive the realities of trade-unionism in the South and facilitated the organizing of rural workers who drifted into urban employments.³⁹

The S.T.F.U. planned a more intensive organizing campaign among migratory and casual laborers, as mechanization and displacement continued to add to their numbers. The union's committee on organization outlined a plan at the 1940 convention to assign State organizers paid

³⁶The program called for the following actions: "1. Government action to end wholesale evictions that take place every December and January in the South. 2. Action by the Farm Security Administration and Federal Housing Administration to keep decent shelter over our heads. 3. Enough relief during the winter months to keep our families from starving. 4. Changing laws at this session of Congress which will make payments of benefits to cotton landlords depend on the following requirements: (a) Full legal sharing of benefit checks. (b) Written contracts between sharecropper and landlord. (c) Holding of Federal wage hearings and setting of a living wage which all growers must pay for work done on the crop before any benefits can be paid to the landlord." (U.C.A.P.A.W.A. News, February 1940, Vol. 1, No. 6, p. 4.)

³⁷U.C.A.P.A.W.A. News, September-October 1940, Vol. I, No. 10 (p. 10).

³⁸In 1940 no less than 27 cities were the scene of meetings, concerts, dinners, and entertainments to raise money for the S.T.F.U. Sponsors, according to The Call, included such luminaries as Mrs. Roosevelt, Mayor F. H. LaGuardia of New York City, screen stars Paul Muni and John Garfield, and others. (The Call, March 9, 1940, p. 1.)

³⁹In an address to the sixth annual convention of the S.T.F.U. held in Blytheville, Ark., in 1940, Anne Ramsay, representative of the I.L.G.W.U., stated that "the (second) reason we are interested in you is because we do have a great deal in common. In Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, etc., there are garment shops opening up. We are trying to organize them. There is no region where it is easier to organize our union than where miners have been organized, for instance. In these places the people know about unions already. In districts where unions have never been heard of, we can't organize the girls in the garment factories. If you understand unionism you can help us. You can tell your daughters, wives, and friends that the union is a good thing." (Proceedings, Sixth Annual Convention, S.T.F.U., January 5-7, 1940, Blytheville, Ark., p. 4.)

from initiation fees. Under them in each State were to be county organizers working on a fee basis, who would be elected by county councils. They were to give special attention to organizing migratory workers in Arkansas, particularly the strawberry pickers of White County.⁴⁰

Little came of this project. By 1941 the union membership was estimated by one officer to number only about 2,000 to 2,500 people in some 100 scattered locals, many of which were inactive. The S.T.F.U. was increasingly busy with administrative tasks as a liaison between Government agricultural agencies and sharecroppers or wage laborers. Its chief objectives were not of a type to be achieved through collective bargaining. Although considering itself mainly a labor organization, it aimed primarily to raise its members by rehabilitation out of the status of laborers, rather than to ameliorate their present lot. "Though we were in the beginning largely an organization of sharecroppers and tenant farmers, today we are more than ever the organization of migratory farm laborers," said H. L. Mitchell, in his Official Report for 1939 (p. 18). However, he added: "We have always held out as our main goal the restoration of land to the landless. * * * A new system of land ownership and farm operation to care for the millions of dispossessed is the need of the hour."

The resolutions passed at the conventions of 1940 and 1941 were hardly more than endorsements of Federal farm programs of benefit to sharecroppers and tenants. The union demanded fuller publicity for the AAA program, fuller participation by tenants and sharecroppers, and payments of crop benefits to tenants and sharecroppers directly by mail. It endorsed the rehabilitation program of the FSA; it passed resolutions demanding that Congress appropriate larger sums to expand it, that it be made a permanent agency independent of the Department of Agriculture, and that "dirt farmers" be put on local administrative boards. The U. S. Housing Authority was lauded for its slum-clearance projects in both city and rural areas, and was urged to work in cooperation with the FSA in developing a joint program for rural housing in the South. The convention proposed that Congress include measures of benefit to agricultural wage workers in its 1940 AAA legislation. The union suggested a provision that would require any farm, ranch, or plantation having 25 or more acres planted to a cash crop, to establish a minimum wage of 25 cents per hour and a working day of 10 hours or less for its employees, in order to qualify for Government benefit payments. The convention also repeated the demand that the Wagner Labor Relations Act be extended to cover agricultural labor. Reports of its activities in the official S.T.F.U. News seemed to indicate that the organization was concerned primarily with such programs as building cooperatives and obtaining larger WPA grants for displaced croppers.⁴¹

The trend away from labor unionism within the S.T.F.U. finally came to a climax in the seventh annual convention held in Little Rock, Ark., in February 1941. H. L. Mitchell, executive secretary, recommended that the union in future concentrate on furthering Government programs which, through improving southern agriculture by long-range reforms, would redound indirectly to the benefit of tenants, sharecroppers, and wage laborers. The union was to become in effect an organization of small farmers and displaced tenants or wage laborers which, like the Farmers Union of Oklahoma, would function as a political pressure group and

⁴⁰S.T.F.U. News, June 1940 (p. 2).

⁴¹Proceedings, Resolutions, Sixth Annual Convention, Blytheville, January 5-7, 1940 (pp. 1-4); S.T.F.U. News, June 1940 (pp. 1-6).

semiofficial administrative agency. Secretary Mitchell was pessimistic regarding the S.T.F.U.'s future as a labor organization:

Despite the breaking off of affiliation with the C.I.O., the policy of the S.T.F.U. since 1937 has been toward establishment of the organization as a trade-union. * * * Though a few hundred members regularly pay dues, the Southern Tenant Farmers Union does not constitute a trade-union. There is no basis for trade-unionism in southern agriculture with conditions such as prevail. No method can be devised whereby an organization of economically insecure people such as tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and farm laborers on southern plantations can bargain with an industry that is disorganized, pauperized, and kept alive only by Government subsidy as is cotton and tobacco production today. (Oren Stephens: *Revolt on the Delta*, in Harpers, November 1941, p. 664.)

A few weeks later the executive council of the S.T.F.U. repudiated Mitchell's position and announced that the organization would continue to function as a trade-union.

Southern Tenant Farmers Union in Retrospect

The S.T.F.U. was effective, not as a cohesive and well-organized trade-union, but rather as a pressure group which could speak for large numbers. Through effective publicity and alliances with sympathetic organizations it was able to win concessions from Government agencies that were of benefit to poorer rural groups in the South. Its spokesmen claim that more than 100,000 people at one time or another have been members of the union since its organization in July 1934, and that they have gained educationally as well as materially.⁴² Some of the S.T.F.U.'s best work lay in winning enforcement of laws designed to help or protect sharecroppers and laborers. A union bulletin in 1940 summarized the main achievements which the S.T.F.U. claimed:

The union has succeeded in exposing certain brutalizing aspects of the plantation system, and has brought to light many cases of peonage and forced labor. It has caused governmental investigations, both State and National, to be made into conditions in the cotton industry. No lynchings have occurred in the areas where these people have organized, and constitutional guaranties of freedom of speech and assemblage have been recognized for the first time in many decades. Wages have been raised and hundreds of thousands of dollars in Government benefits and grants were secured for the sharecroppers through the union's efforts. Better contracts with planters have been effected. Members of the union have been elected to local AAA committees, and for the first time the sharecroppers have had representation on some of the policy-making agricultural bodies. (S.T.F.U. Bulletin, p. 4)

Other advantages were claimed to have been won indirectly by continual union pressure on political authorities. WPA jobs were made more readily available to sharecroppers and farm laborers. The movement to abolish the poll tax gained headway. Free textbooks were provided for Negro children in many more areas than formerly, and more money was spent for rural health work and education concerning diet and diversified farming.⁴³

Above all the S.T.F.U. served to make the southern sharecropper articulate, by acting as his spokesman to helpful outside agencies. To quote the conclusion of one observer:

⁴²S.T.F.U. Bulletin: *The Southern Tenant Farmers Union*, Memphis, 1940 (pp. 1, 2).

⁴³History of the S.T.F.U. (pp. 12, 13).

The S.T.F.U. must be given credit for one important accomplishment. It focussed the spotlight on the plight of the sharecropper in particular and on southern agriculture in general, thus making it possible for the Government to institute the various programs, through the Farm Security Administration, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, Soil Conservation Service, and the Agricultural Extension Service, programs that are today the immediate salvation of Dixie. A scholarly presentation of the problem had come from the Chapel Hill group, in a series of notable books. Official recognition came when President Roosevelt, in commenting on the report of his Tenancy Commission, used that very quotable statement that the South is the Nation's number one problem. But it was the sensationalism of the S.T.F.U.'s actions that made the situation known to the whole population.

That alone is sufficient justification for a full recording, in the region's colorful history, of its brief but colorful existence. (Oren Stephens, *op. cit.*, p. 664.)

CHAPTER XVIII.—Farm-Labor Unionism in Florida

Florida furnishes a strong contrast to other Southern States with regard to agriculture, social structure, and composition of the population. Since cotton has been an unimportant crop, the plantation system has never been established widely.

The pattern of land ownership and control, and the corresponding labor-employer relations in Florida, resemble in many ways those of California. The two States have long been close competitors in the production of citrus fruits sold in distant markets. In California and Florida intensive agriculture has come under the control of large integrated producing units, at the expense of small independent growers. The functions of growing, packing, shipping, and marketing citrus fruits tend to concentrate in cooperative exchanges in which large grower-shipper enterprises play a prominent, if not dominant, role.¹

A similar structure has been developing rapidly in other crops, particularly those grown intensively during the winter months for shipment to northeastern urban markets. Large tracts of land, which were uncultivated before 1920, became suitable for use as the population grew and adequate transportation facilities expanded during the boom years of the twenties. The most important intensive crop areas in Florida were developed during the thirties. Large supplies of seasonal labor were required for harvesting an increasing volume of produce. These were recruited largely from "depression migrants" and the displaced white and colored sharecroppers who migrated to Florida from depressed cotton-producing areas of adjoining Southern States. Like California, Florida became the southernmost base of a coastwise migration of seasonal laborers, employed for short periods in a succession of intensive crops grown in scattered areas along the entire Atlantic seaboard.

One observer described agricultural labor in Florida as follows:

In all the agricultural areas of peninsular Florida, migrants enter into the labor force. The principal areas of migrant concentration, however, are in the extreme southeast, on the rich muck soils rimming the lower shore of Lake Okeechobee, and on the Gulf Stream tempered strip edging the Glades from back of Palm Beach to the tip of the mainland below Miami. Here exist the most propitious conditions for the development of a large-scale industrialized agriculture and here such a form of agriculture is fast developing. Here we find tractors and gang-plows and crop dusting by airplane, thousands of intensively cultivated acres under the ownership of a single individual, tens of thousands under that of a corporation. Here we find also the anonymous hordes of laborers needed in the harvest, not less than 50,000 of them, including their families. No machine has yet replaced the human hand in picking beans, peas, and tomatoes, in cutting sugarcane, celery, and cabbage, and the processes of the packing sheds are still but partially mechanized. The evolution of factories in the field has perhaps not gone so uniformly far here as it has in the rich irrigated valleys of California, simply because it has had less time to work.²

Militant agricultural-labor unionism comparable to that of California was slow to develop because of the relative newness of this agricultural system and the more depressed and insecure position of the migrants. Also, there were no strong urban labor movements to support a campaign

¹Employment Conditions in Citrus Fruit Packing, 1939 (mimeographed report), Women's Bureau, U. S. Department of Labor, Washington, 1940 (pp. 1-3).

²Living and Working Conditions of Migratory Farm Workers in the Florida Vegetable Area. U. S. Department of Agriculture (mimeographed report), Testimony by John Beecher, Farm Security supervisor of Florida migratory labor camps, before the Senate Civil Liberties Committee, May 15 and 16, 1940, Washington, D. C.

to organize agriculture. The principal cities of Florida were built primarily on a foundation of service trades catering to the large tourist population. "Primary" or heavy industries of the type in which vigorous unionism could develop were few. The social structure also was not one in which labor unions could develop effectively.

While commercial relationships in agriculture and urban industry were transplanted largely from the North and West, the status of agricultural (and to some degree urban) labor has been inherited largely from the South. Negroes, who constitute a major part of the farm-labor supply, have faced the traditional "Jim Crow" laws in many fields of social and occupational activity. They tend to lack recourse to legal action to protect themselves from exploitation by whites, and consequently they have suffered violence and intimidation from extralegal groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. In northern Florida the turpentine industry has long been notorious for such conditions among large numbers of its Negro laborers.³

Finally, a continuous heavy influx of surplus rural workers from adjoining Southern States contributed to chronic oversupplies of farm laborers in many intensive crop areas of Florida during the thirties. These made labor relationships exceedingly casual and insecure, depressed the earnings of workers to low levels, and weakened their bargaining power.

Unionism, strikes, and other collective action, in brief, have been almost completely absent in Florida's commercialized vegetable and field crops. Agricultural-labor unionism has centered in citrus fruits, the State's longest established and most important crop. Labor relations in this industry have been far more conducive to organized group conflict than have those of other crops, in general.

Unionism in the Citrus-Fruit Industry

Citrus-fruit farming in Florida, as in California, is one of the most highly industrialized fields of agriculture. Structurally the industry is highly centralized, and it uses quasi-factory methods of growing, packing, and shipping produce. There are some 13,000 growers of citrus fruits for market, but policy making through associations and exchanges tends to center in the largest processing companies, which usually control sizable acreages themselves. The majority of growers are rather passive absentee owners, dominated financially and commercially by a few large companies which pack and ship the fruit for market. These establishments usually buy the fruit "on the tree," and hire the labor as well as provide the equipment required for harvesting operations. Many of them specialize also in "caretaking" the groves of individual owners for stipulated fees; they hire the maintenance labor required for plowing, planting, fertilizing, spraying, pruning, and thinning.

Citrus workers appear to be more easily organized than other types of agricultural laborers, being perhaps the least imbued with the psychology of the farm hand. Their direct employers are the large-scale packing, shipping, and caretaking corporations. Individual laborers are hired as members of maintenance or harvesting crews, employed at a succession of short-period jobs in many groves in the course of a year.

³Article in *New York World*, November 26, 1929; see also, speech of Phillip Randolph in Proceedings of the National Convention of the American Federation of Labor, Tampa, Fla., November 1936.

Citrus-fruit pickers and packers are semiskilled and skilled workers; thus their security and bargaining power are correspondingly greater than that of most agricultural workers. Since learning their work takes care and time, as they become increasingly efficient they are more desirable to the employer. Citrus-fruit picking in earlier years was simply a matter of picking all the fruit at once, clearing the trees one by one. Now, however, spot picking has become general. The workers have to choose the fruit by ripeness, size, kind, and quality to insure its conformity with the stricter grading and shipping regulations imposed by the State.

Citrus-fruit laborers have become residentially stable, usually living in one citrus-growing community the year round. Several developments in the industry explain this trend. In the first place, its demands for labor have become less seasonal; harvesting at one time extended roughly from October to May, but now begins in September and does not end until July. Besides this, additional varieties of citrus fruits have been introduced, and these ripen at different months of the year. This greater diversification, in addition to spot picking, spreads the work over a larger part of the year and keeps the labor employed continuously. There are still 2 or 3 months of slack season in which some of the men go elsewhere to find work, but more and more they live permanently in their own localities. Pickers at one time were predominantly migratory, following several crops in a yearly cycle. Now only a few skilled packers move to other areas when the harvest season is over. Cannery workers are the only group coming from other States in large numbers, and they are usually not so well paid as pickers and packing-shed workers. In some areas, such as Lake Wales and Lakeland, most of the pickers are Negroes and the packers are white; in other sections almost all the labor is white.

The longer growing season and greater residential stability served to strengthen the citrus laborers' potential bargaining power. Their efficiency increased from continuous specialization over a long period, and they became less replaceable than before. The citrus industry is vulnerable to strike action, because of the close functional relationship among growing, harvesting, and processing. Thus, a union can concentrate on the packing sheds alone, since pickers and necessary harvesting equipment are assembled there and transported to the groves.

The bargaining position of the workers was to some degree weakened, however, by the dependency of many of them. During the off-season months some of the workers came to rely on the paternalism of growers and packing companies to provide the necessary credit for groceries, rent, medical service, and the like. In later years more adequate Government relief has somewhat lessened such dependence.

Citrus labor's position in Florida was made more vulnerable by the easy access which the major growing areas had to alternative sources of unskilled labor from southern Alabama and Georgia. Large numbers from these States migrate seasonally to vegetable-growing counties in central and southern Florida. In a critical strike in which the opposition of growers and packers to the labor organizations is sufficiently strong, the former may be willing to suffer temporary losses by hiring, until the strike is broken, unskilled labor imported from the outside in substitution for the more skilled local workers.

Most pickers originally were poor whites who migrated south from the Cotton and Peach Belts of Alabama, Georgia, and the Carolinas. The majority were ignorant of labor organizations. During the first upsurge of unionism in 1933 and its subsequent decline, they were "quick to join

but hard to hold," in the words of one former union official. They were impatient for concrete gains, and once their immediate demands were won they rapidly lost interest. If these were not achieved, they were easily disillusioned and quick to suspect the leadership.

United Citrus Workers of Florida

The United Citrus Workers of Florida, the first important labor organization in the citrus industry, achieved very rapid initial success. Within a few months of its beginning it had attained a membership of 16,000 to 20,000, and claimed complete organization of citrus workers in such centers as Avon Park, Lake Wales, Haines City, and Lakeland. Smaller locals were established in every important citrus-growing center in the State from Biro Beach in the east to Tampa and Clearwater in the west, and from Orlando in the north to Sebring in the south.

The union received its initial stimulus from the NRA, particularly from publicity given to codes governing wages and hours and guaranteeing labor's right to organize. In the beginning the United Citrus Workers enjoyed sympathetic support from local newspapers and businessmen, in the spirit of NRA principles. In Haines City, for instance, 39 firms published the following signed statement on the front page of the local newspaper:

We, the following businessmen of Haines City, pledge our full support to the United Citrus Workers of Florida, and endorse any action of theirs in keeping with the [above] program as outlined in speeches of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Gen. Hugh S. Johnson, and Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins. (Haines City Herald, October 19, 1933, p. 1.)

The U.C.W. followed a policy of organizing every type of labor employed in the citrus industry, regardless of color—gardeners, mechanics and carpenters, pickers, packers, and cannery hands. Negroes, however, were organized in separate sublocals dominated by local unions of whites and had little or no voice in determining policy. Conferences were held in each growing district among representatives of each occupational group in order to formulate specific wage and hour demands. General membership meetings were then held to discuss and coordinate the various group objectives.

The union soon had administrative difficulties as a result of the rapidity with which the membership grew among laborers who had had little or no previous experience with unionism and collective bargaining. Workers organized themselves on numerous occasions into local groups which they identified with the United Citrus Workers, even when not authorized to do so by the State executive board. These took part in some instances in unauthorized strikes, which usually failed because of inadequate preliminary organization, giving rise to adverse reactions for the U.C.W. At the R. W. Burch, Inc., groves near Highland City, a small strike of some 40 or 50 white and Negro pickers, which the packers did not join, was easily broken when the company replaced the strikers by men imported from Lakeland and Bartow.⁴ Two spontaneous strikes of citrus workers in the vicinity of Lakeland were likewise of

⁴Lakeland Evening Ledger, December 13, 1933 (p. 4).

short duration, as the local Government Reemployment Offices supplied workers as fast as strikers left packing houses and groves.⁵

Authorized collective bargaining and strikes were first attempted by the U.C.W. in the Lake Wales growing area during December 1933. In this center of the union's strength, the leaders sought to impose a uniform collective agreement on all local packing plants. A schedule of demands, mainly for improved wages and hours, was presented to the six largest companies, with the threat of a strike if they were not met. The employers were given 10 days in which to decide.

The strike began with a small spontaneous walk-out in nearby Babson Park early in December. It involved 50 pickers belonging to U.C.W. Local 3 of Lake Wales. Though unauthorized, the walk-out was soon supported by the parent organization.⁶ When the principal packing companies in Lake Wales ignored its demands, the union called a general strike at a mass meeting. Some 1,600 workers of various categories responded, not all of whom were paid-up members of the U.C.W. Gardeners and skilled construction workers, including carpenters, electricians, and painters, walked out in sympathy with grove and shed workers. Pickets were established at the gates of the five major packing houses (Lake Wales Citrus Growers Association, Mammoth Grove, Mountain Lake, Highland Park, and Tower City), while the smaller strike begun earlier at Babson Park continued.⁶ Several companies later reached a partial agreement with the U.C.W. whereby their plants could be cleaned by union men.⁶ Through further agreements reached 5 days after the strike began, the maintenance crews at some groves were allowed to return to work, and picketing stopped around most of the properties. However, all packing houses remained closed, grove caretaking ceased for the most part, and no movement of fruit from the area took place for some time.⁷

There was a rather remarkable absence of violence, intimidation, or arrests, considering the duration of the strike and the numbers involved. This was due partly to the policy of caution followed by the union, which in the course of many meetings had laid great stress on the importance of maintaining order. The strikers, local residents most of whom were able to vote, were treated with consideration by local authorities. Moreover, the union, as mentioned before, had gained some support from local business groups. The local newspaper, while deprecating the stoppage of work as a hardship on a community whose incomes depended primarily upon harvesting and shipping citrus fruits, was definitely impartial. Indeed, it played a not unimportant role in finally settling the dispute.⁸

The attitude of relief authorities was more hostile. During the strike a local paper quoted the district CWA director as saying that men who quit jobs in private industry would not be eligible for work relief.⁹ After considerable pressure from union representatives, however, the Polk County CWA Director announced publicly that packing houses and groves must assure a "living wage" before clients would be cut off relief rolls.¹⁰

⁵Winter Haven Chief, December 14, 1933 (p. 1).

⁶Lake Wales News, December 14, 1933 (p. 1).

⁷Idem, December 21, 1933.

⁸Idem, December 14, 1933.

⁹Lakeland Evening Ledger, December 15, 1933.

¹⁰Idem, January 5, 1934.

After a month the strike was finally settled with a signed contract between the U.C.W. Local 104 and the six packing companies. The agreement stipulated compromise wage increases, rehiring of strikers without discrimination, and recognition of union grievance committees.¹¹

The U.C.W. led a walk-out in the large citrus-fruit cannery of Gentile Bros. Co. in Haines City at the same time as the general strike in the Lake Wales area; this ended in failure and brought criticism upon the union leadership. It began in mid-December as an unauthorized spontaneous strike in protest against the discharge of two union members. It was soon upheld officially by the State executive. The union formulated demands which included recognition and wage increases as well as reinstatement of discharged members. The management refused to sign a contract granting these terms, though it did accept them verbally at a mass meeting and lived up to them until the plant was closed, as customary, during the Christmas holidays.

Gentile Bros. then announced that the cannery would remain closed because of "labor trouble." The company's front-page statement in the Haines City Herald, December 21, 1933, declared:

Due to unsettled labor conditions existing in the community, resulting in serious loss of business to this company, and the inability of this plant to operate efficiently and economically on account of said labor conditions; and furthermore, since it is the earnest and sincere desire of this management to avoid any and all disturbances whatsoever, the management has decided to close this plant and cease operations indefinitely.

Gentile Bros. Co.
(Signed) Victor Gentile, *Vice President*.

According to union spokesmen, the company for several weeks, while recruiting a new labor force, was able to have its orders filled by other firms. Few of the 300 to 400 strikers were rehired when the cannery reopened.

A strike by a U.C.W. local in the Polk Company packing house in Haines City in the early spring of 1934 also brought rank and file criticism of the union leadership. The strike was partially successful, in winning a signed union contract stipulating compromise wage increases and recognition. It was felt, nonetheless, that greater gains could have been won if the strike had been made general, a policy which the local president had opposed.

The U.C.W. during the winter of 1933-34 was involved directly and indirectly in several other less important labor troubles in the citrus area. Certain ones of these were unauthorized or spontaneous, and the discord aroused in settling them weakened the union. The substantial membership of the U.C.W., together with its large following of sympathizers, gave its officers considerable status in the community. Local sheriffs and other county government officials whose position depended upon votes treated the union with a consideration accorded to few agricultural workers' organizations. On several occasions union officials were able to settle unauthorized and nonunion spontaneous strikes by influencing employers and law-enforcement officers to make compromises. These actions, however, brought accusations of "collaborating" and "selling out" from some factions among the strikers. Particularly adverse publicity was directed against the leading U.C.W. officials when a local organizer in Lakeland, previously ousted from the union on charges of

¹¹Lake Wales News, January 18, 1934 (p. 2); see Appendix N (pp. 445-446).

being a Communist, was reported abducted and killed by vigilantes who feared his radical labor activities.¹³

The union declined in strength during the spring of 1934. Considering the rapidity of its growth among workers who had had so little previous experience, the organization would have been difficult to maintain even if all of its strikes had been outstanding successes. The numerous failures and compromises as a result of inadequately prepared and hastily called strikes tended to create a certain distrust of the leadership and thus disorganize the union.

Other unfortunate occurrences which often plague newly organized unions developed. Inadequate bookkeeping and accounting, the result partly of the very rapidity with which the organization expanded, led to collection of money for which there were no records. Though the officials primarily responsible were forced to resign, the rank and file lost faith in the honesty of the incumbent leadership.

The U.C.W. had to face, finally, extremely well-organized and powerful opposition from the growing and packing interests. The employers organized themselves specifically for the purpose of "union busting," according to former union officials. Reciprocal arrangements for filling each others' orders in the event of strikes were made and used by the packing companies. Consequently a strike had to be applied throughout an entire growing area if it could hope to be effective.

Strenuous efforts to keep the United Citrus Workers alive were made during the spring and fall of 1934 but to no avail. The last organization attempt on the part of this union took place in Haines City during the fall of 1937 when the Congress of Industrial Organizations began unionizing the citrus industry. Both campaigns collapsed, however, and unions have remained inactive in the industry ever since.

Federal Labor Unions of the A.F. of L.

During the fall and winter of 1933, the American Federation of Labor made some attempts, on the whole unsuccessful, to charter federal labor unions which would compete with the United Citrus Workers. Among these were Citrus Fruit Canning and Packinghouse Workers' Union Locals No. 18243 of Winter Haven, No. 18411 of Clearwater, and No. 18561 of Hollywood. These had been organized and chartered fairly early in 1933, before the U.C.W. had made its greatest advances.

The A.F. of L. soon attempted to displace the independent union from its position of leadership in the industry. During late 1933 and early 1934 several new federal labor unions were chartered: Locals No. 16959 of Orlando, No. 19107 of Auburndale, and No. 19180 of Dundee were each given the title United Citrus Fruit Workers Union.

The A.F. of L. locals adopted a rather conciliatory position in opposition to the U.C.W., which was currently leading a series of strikes. However, Frank G. Heaton, representative of the A.F. of L. in the citrus area, emphasized that the U.C.W. was in no way connected with his organization. Local A.F. of L. unions were, he said, "entirely out of sympathy" with the new movement.¹⁴ L. L. Balles, president of Local No. 18243 of Winter Haven, stated emphatically to local newspapers

¹³Lakeland Evening Ledger, January 4, 1934.

¹⁴Idem, January 3, 1934 (p. 1).

that it was not the purpose of his union to "embark upon a series of strikes and demonstrations." The U.C.W. he criticized as a "State organization using the same name as the local body, but unaffiliated with the A.F. of L."¹⁵

The A.F. of L. citrus workers' unions declined in competition with the U.C.W. By January 1934, only the locals in Auburndale and Winter Haven had survived. Newspapers reported that "the situation in Orlando got out of the hands of the labor leaders," while in Lakeland and other vicinities "agitators * * * who have never done a day's work in an orange grove or packing shed" were active. "In some quarters it is believed," stated the Lakeland Evening Ledger on January 3, 1934, "that if the A.F. of L. should seek a charter the trouble would disappear."

Apparently the function of these local A.F. of L. affiliates was to act as fact-finding agencies. Local No. 18243 of Winter Haven, for instance, conducted a survey of wages and labor conditions in the citrus industry. The membership at one mass meeting instructed the secretary to forward the findings to A.F. of L. President William Green, who was to represent union labor at hearings on the Shippers' and Packers' Code of the NRA. The union recommended a "return to the wage scales of 1929 with an 8-hour day when and where practical." It pointed out that while packing costs to growers had been cut by 22 percent, wages for labor in packing houses and groves had decreased by $33\frac{1}{3}$ to 50 percent during the same period.¹⁶

A number of active left-wing unionists organized local bodies which obtained federal labor union charters from the A.F. of L. after the United Citrus Workers of Florida had almost disappeared. This was in line with the policy currently being followed throughout the country by former affiliates of the Trade Union Unity League. The old federal labor union at Orlando was revived, and citrus workers in Haines City were also reported to have raised money for a federal charter.¹⁷ Local organizations were reported active in citrus-fruit centers in both Orange and Polk Counties, particularly in the formerly well-organized Haines City and Lake Wales.¹⁸

Greater support from urban labor bodies served in part to counteract the apathy among citrus labor which resulted from the decline of the United Citrus Workers. Resolutions calling for the formation of a nation-wide agricultural workers' union were passed by the Central Labor Union of Orlando and the Central Trades and Labor Assembly of Tampa, shortly before the national convention of the A.F. of L. in Tampa late in 1936. The point was stressed that agricultural, packing-house, and cannery workers of Florida, estimated to number approximately 75,000, were the lowest-paid workers in the State. As such they were a threat to the wage scales of better-paid urban trades.¹⁹

Spontaneous walk-outs among cannery workers were the only strikes that occurred in agriculture and allied industries of Florida in 1936. During the last week of the A.F. of L. convention in Tampa, 450 cannery workers at the Tampa Del Monte plant of the California Packing Corp. struck in protest against low wages and a speed-up system. A delegation came to the convention hall for assistance, which cannery and

¹⁵Winter Haven Chief, December 28, 1933.

¹⁶Idem, December 28, 1933 (p. 1).

¹⁷Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 1, August 1935 (p. 1).

¹⁸Idem, Vol. I, No. 3, October 1935 (p. 1).

¹⁹Idem, Vol. I, No. 16, November 1936 (p. 4).

agricultural union representatives provided. They helped to organize the strikers into a local union which later received a federal labor union charter from the A.F. of L. as Cannery Workers Union No. 20326. High officials of the A.F. of L., including President William Green, protested against "persecution" of the strikers, and through pressure on the Chief of Police and other officers obtained the release from jail of four arrested pickets.²⁰

Two more spontaneous strikes broke out about a month later. One of these was a walk-out early in January at the Shafter Cannery in Tampa. Only a few of the departments responded and the strike soon collapsed because it had been inadequately organized beforehand. A walk-out of 525 employees at the Eagle Lake plant and 275 at the Dundee plant of the Florida Gold Canning Co. near Lakeland occurred when the company lowered the heat in vats in which grapefruit were placed before being peeled. The earnings of workers on piece rates were reduced because this made peeling more difficult. Indications that the strike might spread to other plants in the vicinity prompted the employers to seek a quick settlement through arbitration. The management finally agreed to maintain the normal heat in the vats so as to sustain the workers' earnings.²¹

Agitation among urban unions for an organization campaign throughout the citrus-growing area meanwhile was increasing. The Florida Federation of Labor at its thirty-seventh convention in Lakeland on March 9, 1937, passed a resolution endorsing a State-wide committee to organize citrus and other agricultural workers.²²

The A.F. of L. did little organizing until after the new international of the C.I.O.'s United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America had begun a drive in the Ridge section. Much publicity attended the U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s preparations in the late summer of 1937 for establishing a district organization. In answer, Wendell C. Heaton, State Industrial Commissioner and president of the Florida State Federation of Labor, announced that two full-time organizers would be employed by the executive committee of the A.F. of L. for State-wide solicitation of members. He was frank in admitting that the campaign would center in the areas where the C.I.O. was already active.²³

Interunion conflict followed almost inevitably. In Clearwater, for instance, a group of 40 organized citrus workers who had assembled in the Odd Fellows Hall to receive their local U.C.A.P.A.W.A. charter were dispersed when a "stink" bomb was thrown in the door. A.F. of L. spokesmen then announced their preparations for organizing a second local of citrus workers in opposition to the C.I.O.²⁴

Other A.F. of L. federal labor unions were formed in Auburndale, Haines City, Lakeland, and Davenport.²⁵ Collective-bargaining gains were won only in Auburndale. There the A.F. of L. organizers obtained written contracts winning wage increases, time and a half for overtime and holidays, seniority preference, and union recognition, for employees

²⁰Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 1, January 1937 (p. 2); also Tampa Morning Tribune, November 25 and 26, 1936.

²¹Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 2, February 1937 (p. 4); also Lakeland Evening Ledger, January 14, 1937.

²²Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 4, April 1937 (p. 1).

²³Orlando Sentinel, August 22, 1937.

²⁴Tampa Morning Tribune, November 19, 1937 (p. 12).

²⁵Idem, February 19, 1938.

of two of the largest packing houses in the Ridge section.²⁶ These successes were attributed to the employers' fear of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A., which simultaneously was establishing locals in several centers throughout this area. The A.F. of L. was unable to win comparable achievements in other places. Most of the packing-house employers apparently felt that the C.I.O. was not a serious enough threat to warrant signing agreements with other unions in self-defense. The A.F. of L. local in Haines City failed in competition with a temporarily revived local of the old U.C.W., which had the advantage of dues at 25 cents per month as compared with the A.F. of L.'s \$1. Both organizations disappeared when the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. drive throughout the citrus industry collapsed.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A.

The organizing campaign of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in Florida late in the summer of 1937 began inauspiciously because of indiscreet announcements by one of its leading officials in the State. The union consequently had to face much adverse publicity and opposition.

C. R. Jackson, former president of Local 16959, federal labor union of citrus workers in Orlando, was appointed district organizer for U.C.A.P.A.W.A. shortly after the Denver convention. He called a State-wide union rally of agricultural and allied workers for early September, in preparation for unionizing the citrus industry. This aroused the intensely hostile attention of local newspapers and other interests. Jackson was portrayed as "an outspoken Communist and labor advocate" who also "engages in the manufacture of fireworks and small bombs." His statements to the press were described as follows in front-page headlines in the Orlando Morning Sentinel of July 28, 1937:

TROUBLE AHEAD FOR CENTRAL FLORIDA?
ORLANDO COMMUNIST PREDICTS BLOODSHED
VIGILANTES WILL START TROUBLE SAYS JACKSON

Strife and rioting with attendant bloodshed for Orlando and central Florida when the C.I.O. launches a campaign to organize 65,000 workers of the citrus industry, C. R. Jackson, outspoken Communist and labor advocate, declared here yesterday.

That open warfare between the C.I.O. and quickly mobilized vigilantes will develop immediately after the start of the campaign was freely forecast today by Jackson as he confirmed reports that 21 locals of the C.I.O. are scheduled to hold a meeting here Labor Day.

"Communist members of the C.I.O. and A.F. of L. do not want strife and bloodshed," the radical declared, "but the fight will undoubtedly be forced by so-called red-blooded Americans who will form vigilante associations to combat the C.I.O. movement. *I cannot help but feel that trouble will develop because there has been rioting and fatal strife wherever the C.I.O. has marched. Don't misunderstand me. It was not caused by the C.I.O. but by other groups that entered the labor battle.*" (Italics from original article in Morning Sentinel.)

The response of anti-union groups to this news was immediate and specific. The Orlando Reporter Star, the following day (July 29, 1937, p. 1), reported a meeting of the American Legion, Orlando Post, as follows:

LEGION WILL OPPOSE C.I.O.
*Go On Record As Opposed to Proposed Meeting Here
September 4-6*

If the C.I.O. attempts to invade central Florida and organize Negro and white field labor and packing-house workers it will find at least one militant Orlando organization—the American Legion—morally and physically opposing the movement.

²⁶Tampa Morning Tribune, November 5, 1937 (p. 8).

In a stormy meeting last night the Legion took cognizance of a statement issued by Communist C. R. Jackson in which he revealed plans for a State-wide rally of local workers' unions here over the Labor Day week end, September 4, 5, and 6.

The Legion opposed any such meeting in Orlando, and offered its moral and physical support to the sheriff, the county police, and any other law-enforcement agency in event violence flares.

A speech by Delancey Way, past commander of the American Legion post in Orlando, was featured on the front page of the Orlando Morning Sentinel of July 29, 1937:

Men, we must act and we must act now. We cannot wait any longer. I and some of the members here remember the hell that raged here in 1920 when a Communist-inspired insurrection shook this section. Two of our own buddies were killed in that battle, and nobody will ever know how many Negroes were slain.

As a climax to this adverse publicity surrounding the U.C.A.P.A.W.A., the State legislature announced the formation of a six-man committee of senators and representatives modeled after the Dies Committee. It was designed, in the words of the Orlando Morning Sentinel (August 18, 1937), "to investigate Communism, Bolshevism, Pacifism, and other issues if it finds they exist."

The unionizing program of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. during late 1937 and 1938 was concentrated for the most part in the Lake Alfred and Winter Haven districts, though locals were established in many scattered centers. By 1938 the union had chartered 13 locals having a total membership of several thousand citrus workers. In the vicinity of Lake Alfred and Winter Haven alone there were four locals with approximately 1,500 members. In Auburndale and Clearwater the efforts of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. were neutralized by competing locals of the A.F. of L., and in Haines City by the attempted revival of the U.C.W.

The campaign encountered strongly organized opposition from citrus grower-shippers, who, profiting from their experiences in 1933 and 1934, planned their strategy well in advance. According to C.I.O. spokesmen, they intended to defeat the union by provoking premature and unsuccessful strikes; they would then break these through reciprocal arrangements to fill each others' orders. On the other hand, the union claimed the support of independent small growers' organizations, though these were too weak to be effective.²⁷

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s first strike, involving 150 employees of the Eckerson Fruit Cannery of Sanford during late December, was a failure. It began as a spontaneous walk-out for a 25-percent wage increase. The union later took control and attempted to win recognition as sole bargaining agent.²⁸ Only part of the crew struck and the remainder were

²⁷State and Federal regulation of packing and shipping citrus fruits were believed to favor larger grower-shippers at the expense of smaller growers, since the administrative officers enforcing the policy through citrus control committees were also representatives of large packing interests.

At a meeting of independent growers in August 1937, a new organization was formed. One spokesman in an interview with the local newspapers said:

"The Government is attempting to legislate the cash buyer and small independent out of business in order to more effectively control marketing through large units and cooperatives. * * * We are determined to get out from under the heels of the Kirklands [chairman of the citrus control committee] the Commanders [packing and growing management] and the Gentiles [cannery owners and managers of Tree-Gold Cooperative Growers, Inc.]" (Orlando Sentinel, Aug. 3, 1937, p. 2.)

During the general strike in the Lake Alfred-Winter Haven district, according to U.C.A.P.A.W.A. officials, several independent growers' representatives offered to cooperate with the union in a reciprocal agreement: growers would support the workers' demands for higher wages, if the union would support growers' efforts to obtain higher prices for their fruit. This came to nothing, however, as the growers were poorly organized and weak.

²⁸Tampa Morning Tribune, December 28, 1937 (p. 5).

organized into what C.I.O. spokesmen charged was a company union.²⁹ The strikers were checked further by an antipicketing ordinance passed by the Sanford City Commission, which provided for a \$200 fine and 90 days' imprisonment as a penalty for violation.²⁹ After 1 day the strike was declared ended, and union spokesmen lodged complaints with the National Labor Relations Board.³⁰

More successful were two strikes which followed in April 1938. A brief one in Frostproof, involving some 75 pickers and packers, forestalled a threatened wage cut. The other, in Winter Haven, included approximately 75 pickers at the Polk Packing Association grove. They walked out in protest against a reduction in piece rates from 8 to 7 cents per box for oranges and from 5 to 4 cents for grapefruit. Twenty-four hour picketing was maintained at the plant, and operations were stopped. The strike was settled finally with the aid of S. V. White, Conciliator of the U. S. Department of Labor. Though the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was unable to obtain recognition as sole bargaining agent, it did win a signed agreement which stipulated partial restoration of the wage cut, reinstatement without discrimination, seniority privileges, limitation on size of picking crews, and recognition of union grievance committees.³¹ The conciliator in a newspaper interview expressed a wish to "felicitate both Mr. Snively [manager of the Polk Packing Association] and the pickers for the reasonableness of their approach and their conduct throughout." He added the hope that "this magnanimous gesture will serve as a stabilizing influence on employer-employee relationships here and elsewhere, and will be interpreted as a splendid forward step toward the peaceful cooperation of all who make a living from the citrus industry of the State."³²

This optimism proved to be premature. A much larger general strike in the citrus industry took place late in the fall in the vicinity of Lake Alfred and Winter Haven. It began on a small scale on November 18, 1938, at the plant of the Lake Alfred Citrus Growers Association. Sixty-eight pickers walked out after the piece rates were adjusted downward from 8 to 7 cents per box for oranges, from 15 to 14 cents for tangerines, and from 5 to 4 cents for grapefruit. Negotiations between union representatives and the management failed to bring a settlement, and the plant was closed for several days. The pickers were reported unofficially to be willing to accept the orange and tangerine picking rates if the grapefruit rates were returned to 5 cents per box. This compromise the manager, W. A. Stanford, refused to consider. "As far as I am concerned," local newspapers quoted him as saying, "the pickers have quit their jobs and no strike exists. They have been paid off and they are through."³³

The workers meanwhile maintained picket lines around the plant. No violence was reported, and Mayor Johnson of Lake Alfred complimented both union members and management "for their behavior," but feelings on both sides were intensified. The local newspaper, the *Winter Haven Chief*, carried a series of front-page editorials denouncing the chief strike leader, Edward Norman. In one issue he was described as—

²⁹Tampa Morning Tribune, December 29, 1937 (p. 8).

³⁰Idem, December 30, 1937 (p. 5).

³¹CIO News, April 23, 1938 (p. 7).

³²Winter Haven Chief, April 15, 1938 (p. 1).

³³Tampa Morning Tribune, November 19, 1938 (p. 7); November 20, 1938 (p. 12); Winter Haven Chief, November 18 and 19, 1938.

* * * a fairly good business man * * * who seems to have grabbed the right end of the labor proposition, standing on the receiving end of the line along with Jack Lewis, and telling the boys when and how to pick, instead of grabbing a bag and picking himself. (Winter Haven Chief, November 28, 1938, p. 1.)

Union spokesmen complained that officers were assisting the company to penetrate the picket lines with strikebreakers.³⁴ They charged that the company's wage cut was a deliberate attempt to break the union by provoking a strike that could be defeated with the aid of other grower-shippers.³⁵

After a mass meeting of union members, a general strike was finally called against the organized packing houses in the Lake Wales area. It involved approximately 600 men in plants and groves of the Florida Citrus Growers Association, the Winter Haven Cooperative Growers, the Polk Packing Co., the Winter Haven Exchange, and the Pollard Packing Co. Pickets were placed at the gates of the struck plants, but their effectiveness was limited by legal action. Two were arrested as a result of minor violence in a clash between strikers and strikebreakers. Packing company employers obtained an injunction against U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Locals Nos. 10 and 196, prohibiting them from using "threats, force or coercion on buyers, dealers and pickers attempting to do business with the packing houses."³⁶ The county sheriff and deputies provided protection for new crews imported to replace the union men.³⁷ These strikebreakers, union spokesmen charged, were recruited by circular and by word-of-mouth advertising from as far away as Georgia and Alabama.

Editorial attacks by the local newspaper became more threatening. One warned the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. district secretary that the public was becoming increasingly hostile. It concluded that "There is such a thing as mob spirit, you know. Once aroused, this is sometimes quite hard to direct and control." (Winter Haven Chief, December 1, 1938, p. 1.) The only noticeable indication of organized mob action, however, took place after an agreement to end the strike had been reached at a general meeting of the strikers and, according to them, after the meeting had dispersed. On the night of December 5, 1938, hooded members of the Ku Klux Klan, estimated at 400, paraded through Lake Alfred, Auburndale, and downtown Winter Haven in protest against "six or seven strikers in particular and the strike in general."³⁸ The leader of the K.K.K. parade, who would not reveal his identity, stated his views explicitly:

We believe in the principles of Americanism, and do not intend to tolerate strikers and radicals. If there are labor differences they can be settled over the conference table. We know who the radicals are, and we shall take care of them in due course. (Tampa Morning Tribune, December 6, 1938, p. 8.)

Under pressure from a combination of opposing forces, the strike soon disintegrated. One by one the strikers were replaced until, within a week after the general strike had been called, all but one packing company reported having picking crews at work. The union ended the walk-out officially in a mass meeting on December 5, 1938. In press interviews the managements of all the struck plants declared that no agree-

³⁴Tampa Morning Tribune, November 27, 1938 (p. 9).

³⁵The Tampa Morning Tribune later reported that a conference of growers with officials of the Florida Citrus Exchange resulted in a "gentlemen's agreement" to refrain from giving recognition to the C.I.O., and to deal only with individual picking crews (Dec. 4, 1938, p. 10).

³⁶Tampa Morning Tribune, December 1, 1938 (p. 6).

³⁷Winter Haven Chief, December 1, 1938 (p. 1).

³⁸Idem, December 8, 1938 (p. 1).

ments were made with the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. With but one exception they claimed to be paying the same scale of wages that prevailed in the beginning of the season.³⁹

The failure of the strike resulted in the collapse of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. organization in Florida, from which it has never recovered. Some union officials blamed the National Labor Relations Board, which failed at the time to prevent the use of many effective anti-union practices by the packing companies. Subsequently, 12 cases developing from complaints lodged with the Board were all won by the union without being contested by the companies. These included provisions for reinstatement with back pay for discharged strikers.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in Florida, as a number of the more active leaders later admitted, repeated the mistake that it had made in numerous regions during the organizing campaign of 1937 and 1938. Instead of concentrating its efforts on Polk County, where the principal part of the citrus industry was concentrated, it expended its resources and personnel over a wide area. Locals, consequently, could not be adequately serviced and coordinated. The whole structure of rather loosely federated local unions collapsed when the general strike was lost in 1938. With retrenchment forced upon the C.I.O. during the recession of 1938, the funds available to the national U.C.A.P.A.W.A. for organizing purposes were reduced. With it went also the citrus workers' local unions established by the A.F. of L. and the U.C.W.⁴⁰

Vegetable Packing-House Workers' Organizations

Agricultural workers' unions in Florida have been almost completely absent in crops other than citrus fruits, for reasons mentioned before. The insecure status of Negroes, together with the heavy continuous influx of depressed migrants from adjoining Southern States, made farm laborers in Florida too weak to organize for collective bargaining. Scattered outbreaks or unorganized walk-outs occasionally developed. In the fall of 1935, for instance, a spontaneous strike was reported among Negro turpentine workers on the Puritan Oil Co. holdings near Marianna in northwest Florida. It was provoked by the company's announcement that the men were to be paid half in cash and half in orders at the commissary.⁴¹

The only stable and effective union in the vegetable industry was organized among white shed workers of southern Florida. They worked mainly in the intensive tomato-growing areas south of Miami during the winter months. In early spring many migrated to work near Fort Pierce on the east coast, north of Miami, and then, during late spring, to the Bradenton area on the west coast of Florida. From there a number migrated to packing and shipping centers in other States; some

³⁹Winter Haven Chief, December 5, 1938 (p. 1); Tampa Morning Tribune, December 4, 1938 (p. 10).

⁴⁰Since then the only strike to attract attention in the citrus industry was a spontaneous 2-day walk-out on January 27, 1941, at the Lakeland Highland Canning Co.; 300 employees were thrown out of work by a walk-out of 45 grapefruit peelers.

As in a similar strike several years before, the cause lay in a lowering of heat which, in making peeling more difficult, reduced the wages of peelers working on piece rates. Manager C. E. Lindsay reported that the workers returned to their jobs at the same pay and under the same conditions after checking up on pay scales and working conditions at seven other plants in the vicinity. (Lakeland Evening Ledger, Jan. 28, 1941, p. 1.)

⁴¹Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 3, October 1935 (p. 1).

moved up the Atlantic Coast to Maryland and New York; others migrated through Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee, then west; still others went straight west through the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas to California, and back.

The task of organizing the shed workers in southern Florida was undertaken by a small group of the more skilled and migratory packers. About 20 of these had membership cards in the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union No. 18211 of California and had participated in the famous Salinas lettuce-shed strike in the fall of 1936. As a result a number were blacklisted in California, and had to move elsewhere to find work. They formed a union early in 1938 in Princeton, Fla., and obtained a charter from the A.F. of L. as the Vegetable Packing-House Workers Union No. 21494. By 1940 this organization claimed a membership of some 500 shed workers who lived most of the year in scattered packing centers along the lower east and west coasts of Florida, in Homestead, Princeton, Perrine, Bradenton, etc. Many of them worked together in the same crews at various packing houses each year.

Local No. 21494 organized only the three most skilled groups—packers, graders, and box makers. The “floor help”—truckers, loaders, dumpers, cleaners, etc., as well as field workers—were not included because most of them were Negroes. It was felt that the strong southern sentiment against mingling with Negroes, together with the intense competition for jobs in these less skilled occupations, required exclusion of these workers if the bargaining position of the union were not to be seriously weakened.⁴²

Shortly after it was organized the union became involved in a dispute, the settlement of which required the intervention of the A.F. of L. central executive as well as Federal Government agencies. Local No. 21494, like its counterpart Local No. 18211 of Salinas, Calif., assumed State-wide jurisdiction over fruit and vegetable packing-house workers on the ground that the majority of its members migrated seasonally to various centers in their work. In the Bradenton area on the west coast of Florida, union organizers, during April 1938, formulated certain demands regarding wages, hours, and union recognition for the spring “tomato deal.” When these were refused by the employers, the union called a strike in the vicinity of Palmetto.

The union clashed directly with the Florida State Federation of Labor. A deputy organizer of the State federation first read to the union members a letter from A. B. Rome, attorney for the packing companies, which stated that they were “friendly with the A.F. of L. and would be willing at any time to enter into businesslike negotiations with duly accredited unions of local jurisdiction.”⁴³ The organized tomato packers were then informed that their local union would have to have an official charter established in Palmetto and be maintained all year round before it could be recognized officially. The strikers were ordered to cease their walk-out and return to work. When this order was refused the deputy

⁴²The organizers had before them the examples of two previously unsuccessful attempts to organize packing-shed unions in southern vegetable centers: A federal labor union chartered by the A. F. of L. among shed workers in southern Florida in the early twenties was unsuccessful and short-lived because it was too exclusive. It organized only the skilled packers, and did not include the graders and box makers or other groups. On the other hand, Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union Local 20363, chartered by the A. F. of L. as a federal labor union in Mercedes, Lower Rio Grande Valley, Tex., in early January 1937, went to the other extreme. It organized all groups, Mexican and white packers, floor help, and field workers. It was too heterogeneous to have any unity; meetings had to be carried on in two languages, resolutions had to be translated, and a variety of demands had to be met. As a result the union died out 14 months after it was organized and chartered.

⁴³Bradenton Herald, April 23, 1938 (p. 2).

organizer of the State Federation of Labor revoked the charter of Local No. 21494 on the ground that the strike was unauthorized. Leading officials of the union were jailed for their part in the affair. Spokesmen of the Vegetable Packing-House Workers Union charged that the State federation had a corrupt arrangement with the packing companies in Bradenton that was tantamount to "protection" for a fee.

The local newspaper, the Bradenton Herald, denounced the "outsiders" of Local No. 21494. An editorial in its issue of April 24, 1938, stated that—

* * * this free-lancing group had the temerity to appeal to the NLRB, reporting the employers as being inimical to labor organization and refusing to obey the Federal law which compels negotiations with organized groups of employees. The A.F. of L. took up the cudgels for the employers, and notified the NLRB that there was no such violation.

Local No. 21494 subsequently won its point, however. The central executive of the A.F. of L. in Washington, D. C., forced the State federation to return its charter; since the local was a federal labor union chartered directly by the A.F. of L., it was beyond the power of the State federation to determine its jurisdiction or to seize its charter.

The following season 50 members of the union were unable to get work in the Bradenton area, and again complaints were lodged with the NLRB. In both cases, which came before the Board in 1938 and 1939, decisions were rendered against the packing companies involved. They were forced to cease their anti-union practices, negotiate with the union, and rehire discharged union members with back pay.

During 1939 the union won written and verbal contracts covering wages, hours, conditions of work, seniority rights, and union recognition with the three largest packing companies in the Perrine-Princeton and Fort Pierce areas—the Ideal, the Pierce, and the International (the last-named organization being a subsidiary of the Earle Fruit Co. of California). These contracts were renewed in 1940 and revised in 1941.

The bargaining strength of Vegetable Packing-House Workers Union Local No. 21494 has rested partly upon the sympathetic support of local business groups in small-town packing centers. Merchants depending largely on the business of packing-shed workers have had a great interest in helping them achieve higher earnings and, if possible, greater residential stability. The chief efforts of the union and its sympathizers along this line have been directed toward making its members fully eligible for benefit payments under the Social Security Act. Unemployment-insurance disbursements to the families of shed workers would allow for better living quarters and educational facilities for the children while only the head of the family would migrate for work.

CHAPTER XIX.—Farm-Labor Unionism in New Jersey

Agriculture in certain sections of rural New Jersey, New York, and eastern Pennsylvania is primarily a system of highly intensified farming in relatively small units, within areas dominated by urban industries. Regions which specialize in certain intensive crops grown for sale in nearby metropolitan markets require heavy seasonal influxes of labor for harvesting operations. This is particularly true of cranberries grown on the east coast, tomatoes (largely for canning) in the vicinity of Camden, and vegetables and fruit in Cumberland and other southern counties of New Jersey.

Though many farm employers in the North Atlantic States are themselves working farmers, their relationships with their employees usually are different from those traditionally existing between the "family farmer" and "farm hand." The ties of the workers to the farms on which they have been employed have been casual and commercialized. New Jersey growers in particular, situated as they are in a highly urbanized and industrialized State, have had to draw their labor from other employments. For highly seasonal work at low rates of pay, the workers recruited in general have been substandard in comparison with those in urban industries, and quite different from their employers in background and social status.¹

Italians in such cities as New York, Philadelphia, Trenton, and Camden were one regular and long-established source of such seasonal labor. Until the mid-thirties they were recruited largely through the *padrone* system, similar to the labor-contractor system in California and Texas. Growers customarily paid a flat fee to the *padrone*, who arranged for hiring, transporting, feeding, and lodging the workers. Truck farms in southern New Jersey, particularly in Cumberland County, employed large numbers of Negroes recruited from the South through a similar contractor system.

Close trade relations with such metropolitan centers as New York, Philadelphia, and Camden have helped to arouse an antipathy among rural people in New Jersey to certain urban elements. In many cases there were direct conflicts of economic interest between the farmers and middlemen handling farm produce and the labor organizers attempting to unionize workers employed at functions vital to the farmer—particularly truck drivers, cannery workers, and harvest hands. Outside labor unions came into contact with the resident rural population when they organized numerous industries in small and medium-sized towns in intensive farming areas. Occupational groups in such industries as glass blowing, basket weaving, canning, and packing in southern New Jersey became well unionized during the thirties.

Rural-urban economic frictions were intensified by the declining profitability of farming in many sections of the North Atlantic region. The drastic slumps in farm prices during the early thirties were particularly burdensome to old and heavily capitalized farms. Growers in this region also faced increasing competition in selling their produce in New York and other eastern metropolitan markets. New truck-gardening

¹Josiah C. Folsom: *Truck Farm Labor in New Jersey*. U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington. 1925.

areas in the South, particularly in Florida and the eastern Carolinas, had lower labor costs and smaller fixed-debt obligations.

During the mid-thirties New Jersey and neighboring States had temporary farm-labor shortages. The padrone system broke down when adequate Federal and State relief facilities were established. Seasonal workers living in adjacent cities and towns were no longer available in their usual numbers. A partial substitute was found in the southern Negroes. Large numbers migrated seasonally northward up the Atlantic seaboard, following a cycle of ripening truck and berry crops.

The Seabrook Farm Strikes²

Farm workers in southern New Jersey were first organized during the early 1930's by the Agricultural and Cannery Workers Union (eastern counterpart of the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union of California) affiliated to the Trade Union Unity League of the Communist Party. Left-wing organizers considered agricultural labor in this area to be a "highly industrialized farm proletariat" which would be responsive to the appeals of unionism. Relations between workers on farms and those in nearby small towns who were already partially organized were close.

Organizers were faced at the same time with a rural population composed largely of working farmers. These farmers hired little or no wage labor and their own earned incomes were hardly larger than those of wage workers. The Communist Party in New Jersey, in common with its policy in other rural areas, made every effort to organize small-farm operators into an affiliate, the United Farmers League. This body was designed to exert sympathetic pressure in favor of farm laborers who were bargaining collectively with large grower-employers through the Agricultural and Cannery Workers Union.³

The union began its organizing on one of the few large-scale enterprises in Cumberland County, the Seabrook Farms, Inc., comparable in size and degree of industrialization to many of California's famous ranches. Through a process of buying up mortgaged and tax-burdened small farms in the vicinity of Vineland, this enterprise had grown to about 4,000 acres by 1930. It was a highly integrated business operating canneries, hothouses, and other processing plants which utilized the produce of surrounding farms as well as its own.

As a place to initiate its organizing campaign, this company was ideal for the union. It employed several hundred workers, a number of them in highly industrialized operations, who were expected to have little of the personal loyalty which is supposed to typify family-size farms. Moreover, with the help of the United Farmers League the union hoped to capitalize on the antipathy and resentment which neighboring farmers were likely to feel toward this mammoth enterprise with its lower operating costs.

The union was successful in its first contest with the Seabrook interests during the spring of 1934. Some 250 organized employees went on strike in early April, at the critical stage of the planting season when

²For a fuller discussion of these, see Appendix P. (p. 451).

³Donald Henderson: *The Rural Masses and the Work of Our Party* (in *The Communist*. Vol. XIV, No. 9, September 1935, pp. 866-880).

thousands of young plants raised in hothouses were to be transplanted to the fields. Demands formulated and presented to the management included a flat rate of 30 cents per hour for men and 25 cents for women, a proportionate increase in rates for various categories of skilled labor, time and a half for overtime, and union recognition.⁴ Pickets were placed on guard for 24 hours a day along highways bordering the farms. The strike was settled within a few days, with the help of outside mediation. The Seabrook management signed a contract granting the union demands in full.⁵

This did not end the trouble, however. Pleading inability to maintain the higher wage rates called for under the union contract, Mr. Seabrook within a few months informed union representatives that he would not continue operating under its terms. During the "bank holiday" of 1933 the company had been forced to call upon the Federal Government for financial aid. In order to obtain a substantial loan from the Farm Credit Corporation it was required to submit a budget of expenses, and the Federal agency was reported to have ordered lay-offs and a reduction in wages until farm prices improved.⁶ Late in June the company announced a policy of wage cuts and lay-offs of temporary workers.⁷ The union, asserting this to be a direct violation of the contract signed in April, promptly called a strike. Seabrook was accused of deliberately trying to smash the union.⁸

For several months after the first strike both sides had been preparing for further discord. Organizers of the Trade Union Unity League were enlisting the support of small farmers through the United Farmers League. Potential strikebreakers among the unemployed were organized into unemployed councils in the small towns, and sympathizers among urban small-business and professional classes were appealed to by such bodies as the International Labor Defense. Mr. Seabrook, on the other hand, appealed for support from locally organized businessmen and farmers who feared that unionism and strikes would lead to higher labor costs and losses in pay rolls.⁹ Through full-page advertisements in the local Bridgeton Evening News,¹⁰ he endeavored to win a sympathetic public opinion by stressing the prominence of "Communist agitators" in the labor-organizing campaign.

Violence followed almost immediately upon declaration of the second strike. Warrants were issued for the arrest of participants from both sides on charges of assault and battery.¹¹ Union spokesmen accused the Seabrook interests of "importing professional strikebreakers" and "instigating a reign of terror,"¹² while farm representatives charged that "constant intimidation was resorted to by foreign Communist agitators from New York City," a number of whom were "desperate characters, including thieves, pickpockets, and racketeers."¹³

⁴Lesser demands stipulated that no further increases in rent or other commodities be made by the management, that no money be taken from the workers' pay on any pretext, that each person renting from the farm be provided a rent book, and that the union chairman be reinstated in his job as team driver (from which he had been discharged for union activities). (Evening News, Bridgeton, April 6, 1934.)

⁵Evening News (Bridgeton), April 10, 1934.

⁶Idem, June 30, 1934.

⁷Philadelphia Record, July 9, 1934; Evening News (Bridgeton), June 30, 1934.

⁸L. Dahl: Some Aspects of the Work in South Jersey, address before United Farmers League of New Jersey. Camden, 1935. (Appendix O, p. 448.)

⁹Evening News (Bridgeton), July 3, 1934.

¹⁰Idem, July 5, 1934; July 7, 1934. (See Appendix P, p. 452.)

¹¹Idem, June 29, 1934.

¹²L. Dahl: Some Aspects of the Work in South Jersey.

¹³Evening News (Bridgeton), June 30, 1934.

Within a week after the strike had been called, a vigilante movement was formed. It began with an address by Mr. Seabrook at a meeting of some two dozen leading farmers of Cumberland County, who, "having seen the effects of the strike on the Seabrook Farms, are fearful that they may be forced to halt operations when the harvest season starts in a few days."¹⁴

A series of incidents leading to violence and arrest culminated in a clash between pickets and law-enforcement authorities on July 6, 1934. The hand-to-hand battle was finally ended with a barrage of tear gas.¹⁵ The county sheriff deputized 27 men from the vigilante committee of neighboring farmers.¹⁶ Strikers implicated in the riots were arrested, and a round-up began of "all persons picketing on farms who had no right there." Several were charged with vagrancy when it was found that they had come from outside.¹⁷ Governor Moore refused Sheriff Brown's appeal for the National Guard. State troopers, however, were rushed to the scene, reinforced by the 27 deputized farmer-vigilantes armed with pickaxe handles.¹⁸

This strike of some 250 to 300 Seabrook employees finally was settled after 15 days. An agreement was reached with the aid of John A. Moffett, Conciliator from the U. S. Department of Labor. It stipulated the maintenance of prestrike wage levels, rehiring of strikers without discrimination, and establishment of a 5-man "board of adjustment," to include 2 workers' representatives, 2 farmers' representatives, and the Conciliator. Further violence was narrowly averted when farmers threatened to lynch union organizer Donald Henderson for expressing his opposition to the agreement.¹⁹

The conflict between interest groups generated by the strike did not end with its settlement. Local business groups announced that a "long-continued drive" would be launched to "prevent Communists from interfering with organized labor."¹⁹ In Bridgeton (Cumberland County) the vigilantes organized during the strike by farmers and members of the American Legion subsequently obtained passage by the city council of an ordinance prohibiting unlicensed meetings. Police permits were required for all public meetings "if noisy," even if held in a home.²⁰ Gatherings of more than three persons on the street at any time were prohibited. The ordinance was enforced with arrests of organizers who violated it by attending open-air meetings and distributing leaflets.

These attacks merely served to align other liberal and labor groups with the Communist organizations in self-defense. The Philadelphia Record of August 13, 1934, reported one meeting in Bridgeton of more than 300 delegates from a score of miscellaneous organizations representing churches, Communist and Socialist affiliates, unemployed councils, and A.F. of L. unions. Pressure from steadily growing numbers of labor sympathizers forced the local authorities in time to relax their restrictions. Finally, early in 1935, the charges against strikers and agitators were dropped. Of 54 arrests over an 8-month period, only 2 persons served time in jail. "As a result of these activities," reported Leif Dahl, State organizer of the United Farmers League, "South Jersey

¹⁴Evening News (Bridgeton), July 3, 1934.

¹⁵New York Times, July 7, 1934.

¹⁶Idem, July 10, 1934.

¹⁷Evening News (Bridgeton), July 7, 1934.

¹⁸Idem, July 9, 1934.

¹⁹Bridgeton Herald, July 11, 1934.

²⁰Philadelphia Record, August 13, 1934.

today, despite the unprecedented break-down of capitalist economy, enjoys a greater freedom of expression and organization than it has for years." (L. Dahl, p. 5.)

Agricultural Workers' Unions and the A.F. of L.

After the abandonment of dual unionism and dissolution of the Trade Union Unity League by the Communist Party in 1935, local organizations of agricultural and cannery workers were chartered as federal labor unions affiliated to the A.F. of L. The Seabrook strikers and other Cumberland County farm workers were organized in Agricultural Workers Union Local 19996, with headquarters in Bridgeton.

This organization expanded rapidly in scope and membership during 1935 and 1936. It established branches or sublocals in several communities: Freehold (Monmouth County), Penns Grove and Salem (Salem County), and Cedarville, Newtonville, and Richmond (Cumberland County). Organizers proposed to unionize pickers and general laborers in the cranberry crop in and around Hammonton (Atlantic County). Plans were made to organize a local at Landisville (Cumberland County), to include Italian field and packing-shed workers. Organizers conferred with officials of the Landisville Fruit Growers Association, which had been sympathetic with the Agricultural and Cannery Workers Union during the Seabrook strikes, to negotiate a contract establishing union wages and a union label on produce shipped by organized growers to the New York City market.²¹ Ultimately it was hoped to have agricultural workers organized into a network of federal labor unions in each county throughout the State.

The movement was championed in New Jersey by the State Federation of Labor, which was one of the first of such bodies to give definite support to organizing farm labor. At its fifty-seventh annual convention in Atlantic City during September 1935, the federation unanimously passed a resolution calling upon its affiliated unions to support agricultural workers. It requested the American Federation of Labor to grant a 50-percent reduction in initiation fees and dues for its affiliated agricultural-labor unions, and to sponsor a national convention of all farm-labor organizations.

The New Jersey State Federation of Labor became the spearhead for enlisting Nation-wide support from the A.F. of L. for a broad organizing campaign among all agricultural workers. An amended form of the same resolution was introduced by a State federation representative and passed at the fifty-fifth national convention of the A.F. of L. in Atlantic City during November 1935.²²

²¹Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 14, October 1936 (p. 3); Vol. II, No. 2, February 1937 (p. 4).

²²The text of the resolution was as follows:

"Whereas the growing and processing of foods is the largest single industry in the United States, employing more than 3 million men, women, and children; and

"Whereas these workers have been and are today the most exploited section of our population, everywhere receiving wages far below even the lowest union wage rates; and

"Whereas the present unorganized condition and starvation wage rates of these workers operate in every section of the country to undermine the existing wage rates of organized industrial workers, thus hampering the continued growth and well-being of the entire trade-union movement; and

"Whereas many local trade and federal labor unions have been organized among these agricultural, cannery, and packing-house workers; and

"Whereas the New Jersey State Federation of Labor at its fifty-seventh convention unanimously adopted a resolution recommending the following actions to this national convention of the A.F. of L.; therefore be it

(Continued on p. 348)

An ambitious program to organize agricultural workers on a State-wide basis in New Jersey was launched by Leif Dahl and his lieutenants. By early 1937 four federal labor unions and one independent union had been organized and chartered for counties in southern and central New Jersey: Agricultural Workers Union No. 19996 of Cumberland County, No. 20633 of Atlantic County, No. 20708 of Burlington County, No. 20318 of Monmouth County, and an unaffiliated organization for Salem County.²³

In the spring of 1936 the local unions held an "annual conference to set farm wages" as a tentative step toward promoting collective bargaining and influencing wage and employment conditions. Delegates from several counties met to formulate a scale of wage demands toward which local organized farm workers should aim. The attendant publicity and group pressure, it was hoped, would influence county boards of agriculture and other farm-employer groups to adopt the standards suggested. The union's South Jersey executive board emphasized that the union wage scale should not be set so high that farm workers throughout south New Jersey would not fight for it.²⁴ The minimum wage demanded was set at 30 cents per hour, or \$10 per week with board and \$15 per week without.

More ambitious was the New Jersey Conference of Agricultural Workers in March 1937, attended by 60 delegates of farm-labor unions and addressed by State Senator Linwood E. Erickson, among others. A higher scale of wage demands was established, with a minimum of 35 cents per hour. Following the example of several other States, the conference voted to establish a State agricultural organizing committee composed of union members from the most important agricultural counties.²⁵

The wage conference became a forum where agricultural workers could express their grievances and demands, rather than an effective instrument for collective bargaining. Each local represented an insignificant fraction of the total labor group under its jurisdiction in each county. Even the most important local, Agricultural Workers Union No. 19996 of Bridgeton, could claim only an eighth of the farm laborers in Cumberland County by late 1936. It claimed no membership whatever on the Seabrook Farms, where the spectacular strike victories of 1934 had been won.²⁶ A small "stay-in" strike in protest against a 15-cent-per-hour wage on the Shoemaker farm in the nearby Cedarville vicinity was easily broken. The State police were called in and the workers were told to accept the existing wage or leave.²⁷

²³*Resolved*, That the fifty-fifth convention of the A.F. of L. urge all its affiliated union, central, and State bodies to pay special attention to the problems, needs, and organizations of these workers; and be it further

Resolved, That the executive council plan a national campaign for the organization of all agricultural, cannery, and packing-house workers into unions of the American Federation of Labor at the earliest possible date." (Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 4, November 1935 (p. 1.)

A further resolution against forcing unemployed to work on farms at low wages was passed after being introduced by Leif Dahl, representing Agricultural Workers Union No. 19996 of Bridgeton. Leif Dahl, with the exception of representatives from the Sheep Shearers Union, was the only farm-worker delegate present at the convention. (Rural Worker, November 1935, p. 1.)

²⁴Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 6, June 1937 (p. 5).

²⁵"Rather than set a wage scale that we really ought to have, supported by one hundred workers, it would be better to have a wage scale that we can really get, though lower, supported by thousands of workers." (Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 9, April 1936, p. 1.)

²⁶Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 4, April 1937 (p. 1).

²⁷Idem, Vol. I, No. 10, May 1936 (p. 5); Vol. I, No. 12, July 1936 (p. 2).

²⁸Idem, Vol. I, No. 12, July 1936 (p. 2).

These agricultural unions, nevertheless, were not without influence in rural areas. In Cumberland County, where the union was strongest, wages during the 1936 harvest season averaged 20 to 25 cents per hour, and on some farms reached the union rate of 30 cents. In relatively unorganized Gloucester and Salem Counties the rates were reported to be 10 and 15 cents per hour.²⁷

Agricultural workers' unions in New Jersey were more effective as collective-bargaining organizations or pressure groups acting for unemployed in small towns. These were the principal farm-labor supply. Early in 1935 New Jersey growers raised the familiar complaint of a chronic labor shortage. Ex-migratory farm laborers refused to leave the relative security of the relief rolls in New York, Philadelphia, and other cities for jobs on southern New Jersey berry and vegetable farms. Considerable crop losses were reported.²⁸ Refusal on the part of many growers to provide transportation and housing facilities, which had previously been left to padrones, contributed to the farm-labor shortage.²⁹

Unable to recruit the usual labor supply from the outside, growers urged New Jersey relief authorities to close down projects and release local clients for farm work. Clients, acting through various unemployed organizations, forcefully opposed this policy. The Workers Alliance of New Jersey protested to the State Labor Department and relief officials against "misuse of relief workers under the present slave-wage conditions."³⁰ Later in the year a convention in Camden united unemployed unions of southern and central New Jersey into a new United Association of Unemployed of New Jersey. This included the membership of the Associated Industrial Workers of southern New Jersey, the Unemployed Councils of Newark and metropolitan areas, and the organized unemployed of Trenton and central New Jersey.³¹ The convention passed a resolution pledging a policy of close cooperation with agricultural workers in A.F. of L. locals, to combat grower-employer pressure on the relief policy.³²

Local unions of unemployed, organized under Communist influence in Cumberland County, had cooperated closely with the Seabrook Farm strikers in 1934. Organized grower-employer pressure to cut the relief rolls in 1935 stimulated a renewed militancy. Agricultural Workers Union No. 19996 and unemployed locals of Millville, Vineland, and Bridgeton together ran ex-"hunger striker" W. O'Donnell as candidate on a Farmer-Labor ticket for State assemblyman in the fall elections.³³ Later, with the support of the State-wide association of unemployed, Local No. 19996 won major collective-bargaining gains for members on relief projects. Early in 1936 it reported obtaining an agreement from

²⁷Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 12, July 1936 (p. 2).

²⁸New York Times, June 29, 1935.

²⁹Philadelphia Record, June 29, 1935.

³⁰Idem, June 30, 1935.

³¹Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 3, October 1935 (p. 2).

³²"This Convention for Unity of the Unemployed of New Jersey recognizes the close relationship between the problems of the seasonal farm worker and their own.

"We realize that as long as the majority of farm workers are unorganized and coolie wages prevail, that relief standards, wages in industry, and on the new works projects will be dragged to a low level.

"We have seen already the influence of the rich farmers in postponing the beginning of projects until the growing season is over. We know that in most localities the rich farmers fight against these projects because they are afraid that we will organize and force wages up.

"Therefore this convention states that the closest cooperation will be established between our organizations and the Agricultural Workers Union, A.F. of L., so that our joint action will benefit both the unemployed, the project workers, and the farm workers." (Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 3, October 1935, p. 2.)

³³Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 2, September 1935 (p. 2).

the district director of WPA, which provided that project workers would not be sent to work in the fields at less than the union rate of 30 cents per hour.³⁴ Additional demands were met after Local No. 19996 and local unions of unemployed held mass meetings in various towns and threatened to call a protest strike. On county relief projects wage increases averaging 10 percent were claimed, and union recognition was won. Union officials were entitled to regular pay for time spent on necessary committee tasks during regular working hours.³⁵ Later, in May 1936, the agricultural workers' union and local unemployed organizations participated in the highly publicized State-wide hunger-march to the State capital at Trenton, to protest the cut in relief appropriations for New Jersey.³⁶

Cannery Unions

Attempts were made to organize the more important canneries in New Jersey at the same time that the campaign was being carried out among farm workers and unemployed in rural areas. The most important plant in this industry was that of the Campbell Soup Co. in Camden, N. J.—said to be the world's largest cannery. During 1933 and 1934 the management formed a company union to forestall unionization of its employees by outside forces. The Trade Union Unity League affiliate, the Agricultural and Cannery Workers Union, was organizing cannery workers at the same time that it was leading the Seabrook strikes. During the summer of 1934 a 5-week strike ensued at the Campbell plant under the leadership of Cannery Industrial Union No. 1 of the T.U.U.L.

The settlement of the strike, although unsatisfactory to the union, did yield some gains to the employees. Wage levels were raised and remained considerably above those of other canneries in southern New Jersey.³⁷ The issue of union recognition, however, remained unsettled. The strike ended in a compromise agreement specifying a system of proportional representation between the company union and Cannery Industrial Union No. 1. This arrangement split the employees into cliques. Despite the efforts of organizers, Cannery Industrial Union No. 1 was disrupted and finally dissolved.³⁸

In line with general organizing policy in agriculture and allied industries, late in 1936 a federal labor union was chartered in Camden as Cannery Workers Union No. 20224. Though most of its membership was in the Campbell plant, it was unable to win union recognition or significant improvements in wages and conditions.

Some 250 to 300 employees of the Francis J. Leggett cannery in Landisville (Cumberland County) were organized during the summer of 1936 and received a federal labor union charter from the A.F. of L. as Cannery Workers Union No. 20279.³⁹ Most of the employees came from families of small truck and poultry farmers in the area. Working

³⁴Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 7, February 1936 (p. 1).

³⁵Idem, Vol. I, No. 6, January 1936 (p. 4).

³⁶Idem, Vol. I, No. 10, May 1936 (p. 5).

³⁷Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 2, September 1935 (p. 5).

³⁸Proportional representation meant that there had to be a two-thirds vote on every question before it could be passed or accepted as representing the employees' demands. The company union had 10 votes and the C.I.U. No. 1, had 12. (UCAPAWA News, Camden, N. J., Vol. I, No. 1, April, 1941, p. 3.)

³⁹Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 13, August 1936 (p. 3).

conditions in this small-town cannery were inferior to those in plants in larger cities like Camden. Union spokesmen complained of sweatshop conditions: wages as low as 8 cents per hour in some departments and from 12 to 18 working hours per day during a rush season of 4 months. After repeated attempts to negotiate with the management, the union called a strike late in July 1936, and filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board. Union demands included wage increases, union recognition, seniority rights, and a 10-hour day and 6-day week maximum during the rush season.³⁹

After 4 days the strikers won wage increases reported to average \$2.50 per week per person and recognition by the management of union committees to discuss grievances.⁴⁰ Important in contributing to this initial success was the backing from other organizations. The strikers enlisted the cooperation of the local truckers' union and the Landisville Auction, a small farmers' cooperative. A union committee was sent to New York City to win the support of the Leggett & Co. warehouse workers.⁴¹ Despite the fact that the strike forced the price of tomatoes down 10 cents per basket, the Farmers Union and the Landisville Fruit Growers Association also supported the strikers.⁴²

Cannery Workers Union No. 20279 of Landisville in the spring of 1937 participated with other farm and cannery workers' unions in the State-wide conference held at Camden, to formulate wage scales for agriculture and allied industries.⁴³ It did not, however, join other local unions of New Jersey in sending representatives to the Denver convention of July 1937, at which the C.I.O. United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America was formed.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A.

The New Jersey State Federation of Labor was one of the most active affiliates of the A.F. of L. in promoting the unionization of agricultural laborers. With this support, representatives of local agricultural-labor unions in New Jersey had taken the initiative at A.F. of L. conventions in pressing for a separate international union for workers in agriculture and allied industries. New Jersey was represented at the Denver convention in July 1937 by five county agricultural workers' unions and one cannery workers' local of Camden, all having federal labor union charters. These were absorbed into the new C.I.O. international, the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America. Leif Dahl, former State organizer of the United Farmers League and later of farm-labor union locals, was appointed president of District VII, including Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut.

The new organization was not active for long in organizing farm laborers. District organizers early in 1938 held meetings in farming centers of southern New Jersey such as Marlton, Glassboro, Bridgeton, Swedesboro, Newtonville, and Freehold. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. announced preparations for holding the customary annual State conference

³⁹Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 13, August 1936 (p. 3).

⁴⁰Idem, Vol. I, No. 15, October 1936 (p. 3).

⁴¹Idem, Vol. I, No. 14, September 1936 (p. 3).

⁴²Idem, Vol. I, No. 15, October 1936 (p. 3).

⁴³Philadelphia Record, March 22, 1937.

for agricultural workers.⁴⁴ This campaign was soon abandoned, however. Agricultural workers' organizations in New Jersey faced a major obstacle from the growing number of out-of-State migrants. Additional thousands of southern Negroes were imported, as resident workers on relief rolls were not attracted to low-paid farm jobs. Organized agricultural workers were demoralized and their potential bargaining power was weakened. Wage rates and living conditions were depressed, and violent racial antipathies were aroused. The migrants, being nonresidents, lacked the legal protection enjoyed by those who were able to vote.

This situation reached a climax in August 1939, when 12 masked and armed white vigilantes in Cranbury one night kidnapped, beat, stripped, and painted several Negroes and warned them to "get back South where you belong."⁴⁵ The Negro plaintiffs were represented in court by the Workers Defense League of New York City, which won for them a court award of \$9,000 damages.⁴⁶

The only field workers' strikes to occur in U.C.A.P.A.W.A. District VII originated spontaneously, and the union took part in only two. All exhibited rather unusual features in comparison with farm-labor difficulties in other areas.

Two strikes in Pennsylvania during 1937 attracted considerable publicity, for their unique qualities rather than for their size or importance. In March, 35 farm hands struck on the 12,000-acre, fox-hunting farm near Ligonier, owned by the Mellon family and reported to be valued at \$2,500,000. The strikers demanded an increase of 10 cents per hour above the prevailing 30-cent wage. The strike was settled with a compromise increase of 5 cents per hour. Mr. Mellon criticized his employees for being "tremendously ungrateful" and threatened to close the farm.⁴⁷

Another small strike took place about the same time on the nearby summer estate of steel magnate Charles M. Schwab. Ten farm hands "sat down" in the potato-storage cellar, which they had equipped with radio and gas heater, to enforce their demands for higher wages.⁴⁸

A small spontaneous strike of about 50 workers occurred on a farm in the vicinity of Plymouth, Pa., during August 1938. Most of the strikers were grade-school and high-school youths. They demanded an average increase of 30 cents per day above the prevailing 80 cents to \$1.35 per 10-hour day. The walk-out failed when the employer refused to grant the wage demands on the ground that prevailing prices for farm produce made it impossible.⁴⁹

A larger spontaneous strike occurred on the vast Kings Farm Inc. of Bucks County, in northeastern Pennsylvania, during late July and August of the same year. Approximately 400 to 500 farm workers walked

⁴⁴Camden Courier, March 14, 1938; CIO News, Vol. I, No. 15, March 22, 1938 (p. 8).

⁴⁵New York Herald Tribune, August 13, 1939.

⁴⁶News (Newark), May 10, 1940; see also Jersey Joads—the story of the Cranbury Case, Workers Defense League pamphlet, New York, May 5, 1940.

⁴⁷Surrounding the 12,000 Mellon acres, mostly wooded, were 240 other farms. Since 1911 the owners had permitted the Mellons and their guests to hunt on their property, and in return the Mellons had employed members of their families at hourly wages as farm hands. The 35 who went on strike were all men from neighboring farms.

When their wage demands were not met, the strikers persuaded owners of the adjoining farms to sign a petition, which withdrew hunting rights and would have restricted the fashionable Mellon hunts to the Mellon acres. In the face of Mr. Mellon's threat to close down the estate, the farmers retracted their petition. (See Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 4, April 1937, p. 5; Birmingham Post, March 12, 1937, p. 4.)

⁴⁸Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 4, April 1937 (p. 5); Birmingham Post, March 12, 1937 (p. 4).

⁴⁹Wilkes-Barre Record, August 9 and 10, 1938.

out in protest against a wage cut of 3 to 5 cents per hour. The management claimed the decrease was made necessary by heavy losses in crops already marketed and prospects of continued low prices.⁵⁰

A delegation of strikers called on the regional C.I.O. director for assistance. Leif Dahl, district U.C.A.P.A.W.A. president, was dispatched to organize the strikers and negotiate for them. Additional demands were formulated, including union recognition, clean drinking water, and, according to the Trenton Evening Times of July 20, 1938, "the right to go to church on Sunday morning without being fired for not reporting to work."

Some violence and consequent legal action occurred in the course of the strike. In one scuffle a striker suffered a serious brain concussion.⁵¹ Later two farm officials and five strikers (including three girls) were arrested for assault and battery.⁵² Farm officials charged that groups of strikers were visiting other workers' homes to intimidate them into joining the walk-out.⁵³ Union representatives, on the other hand, filed a protest with Pennsylvania's Governor Earle against the maintenance of State troopers near the picket line. They also lodged charges with the U. S. Department of Justice that strikebreakers were being imported from New Jersey and other States in violation of the Byrnes Act.⁵⁴

The strike was settled after 3 weeks in a conference including a mediator from the State Department of Labor and a conciliator from the U. S. Department of Labor, as well as farm officials and union representatives. A contract was signed providing for union recognition and the dismissal of an anti-union foreman. The wage question was left for future conferences.⁵⁵ Union spokesmen hailed the contract as "the first step in a campaign to organize farm workers in the Bucks County area,"⁵⁶ but apparently such a drive was never launched.

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. participated in a strike in Batavia (up-State New York) that aroused considerable interest as a test case for the Wagner Act. In mid-April 1938, 18 women bean cullers employed in the cooperative warehouse of the Grange League Federation Inc. in Batavia struck spontaneously for a wage increase. The union stepped in to organize a local and bargain for the discharged strikers. The farmer-owners, who opposed the union's efforts to "creep towards the farm," directed the G.L.F. to refuse recognition to the union. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. lodged a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board.⁵⁷

The issue before the Board was whether labor performed on agricultural produce which had been taken from a farm constituted farm work and as such was exempt from the jurisdiction of the Wagner Act. The union maintained that the respondent was a corporation and thus entitled to no distinction under the act. The G.L.F., on the other hand, maintained that it acted only as an agent or broker for farmers who owned the warehouse cooperatively. Cullers who worked there through the winter and spring were employed on farms during the summer season.⁵⁸

The trial examiner's intermediate report ordered the federation to

⁵⁰Evening Times (Trenton), July 18, 1938.

⁵¹Idem, July 20, 1938.

⁵²Philadelphia Inquirer, July 27, 1938.

⁵³Evening Times (Trenton), July 19, 1938.

⁵⁴Philadelphia Inquirer, July 27, 1938.

⁵⁵Philadelphia Bulletin, August 3, 1938.

⁵⁶CIO News, Vol. I, No. 38, August 20, 1938 (p. 7).

⁵⁷Buffalo News, July 21, 1938.

⁵⁸Idem, July 22, 1938; Utica Observer-Dispatch, July 22, 1938.

bargain collectively with the union, to pay back pay, and to cease and desist from interfering with the workers' right to self-organization. In June 1942, the case was closed, when the federation complied with the order.

A spontaneous strike near Clinton (in up-State New York) also revealed some interesting manifestations of collective bargaining. Several farmers promised to pay a rate of 25 cents per bushel for picking peas, but after a wage conference of growers in the area a lower rate was agreed upon. When the pickers expressed dissatisfaction, they were told that if they could force W. J. Currie, local large-scale operator, to pay the 25-cent rate other growers would do likewise. A walk-out of 150 out of 600 Currie employees soon followed.⁵⁹

Financial difficulties facing the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. during the recession of 1938 forced it virtually to abandon the organization of farm workers throughout the United States. Almost all new locals which it organized in District VII were composed of urban processing workers in the larger metropolitan areas of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The third district annual convention in December 1939 announced a policy which had been used in effect during the past 2 years. Delegates voted to concentrate their organizing drives in New York City, Camden, and Philadelphia, with a full-time organizer in each of these cities. The District headquarters was transferred to New York City early in 1940⁶⁰ to facilitate the campaign.

Numerous strikes, during 1938 to 1940, some lasting several weeks and even months, won significant gains for the union in wages, hours, working conditions, and recognition. Most of these were among labor groups and industrial plants somewhat distantly related to agriculture. In the Philadelphia area the most notable were those involving (1) Cannery and Preserve Workers Union Local No. 186 in the Brown Packing Co., Lummis & Co., American Preserve, Clare Food and Relish, Cherry-Levis, and Empire Pickling companies;⁶¹ (2) the United Nursery Workers Local No. 193 in the Mount Lebanon Cemetery, the Edison Landscape Co. of Drexel Hill, and the Robert Craig Co. nursery of Norwood;⁶² and (3) the Nursery, Florist, Gardeners, and Cemetery Workers Union Local No. 74 in numerous cemeteries of the city.⁶³ Outstanding U.C.A.P.A.W.A. victories in New York were the contracts won by the United Food Packers Local No. 207 with the Hills Brothers Co., packers of Dromedary dates,⁶⁴ and the strikes of Cigar Workers Locals No. 273 and 250 against the Enrico Cigar and De Nobili Cigar companies respectively.⁶⁵ New United Tobacco Workers Locals No. 647 and 638 were later chartered in Long Island and in Lancaster, Pa.⁶⁵

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in New Jersey organized and won strikes in such establishments as the Poultrymen's Feed Co. in Toms River, the Fruit Products Co. of Belleville, and the Campbell Soup Co. of Camden.⁶⁶ The strike in the last-named company resulted in the most significant victory for the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. on the east coast.

⁵⁹Utica Observer-Dispatch, July 14, 1939.

⁶⁰UCAPAWA News, Vol. I, No. 6, February 1940 (p. 16).

⁶¹Idem, Vol. I, No. 3, September 1939 (p. 12); Vol. I, No. 8, May-June 1940 (pp. 6, 9); Vol. I, No. 10, September-October 1940 (p. 7).

⁶²Idem, Vol. I, No. 10, September-October 1940 (p. 16); Vol. I, No. 6, February 1940 (p. 7).

⁶³Idem, Vol. I, No. 6, February 1940 (p. 10).

⁶⁴Idem, Vol. I, No. 7, April 1940 (p. 6); Vol. I, No. 8, May-June 1940 (p. 1).

⁶⁵Idem, Vol. I, No. 7, April, 1940 (pp. 4, 5). Previously several cigar makers' unions in the A.F. of L. had seceded and joined the U.C.A.P.A.W.A..

⁶⁶UCAPAWA News, Vol. I, No. 10, September-October 1940 (p. 7); CIO News, Vol. I, No. 36, August 13, 1938 (p. 8); and UCAPAWA News, Vol. I, No. 7, April 1940 (p. 7).

After the collapse of the independent Cannery Industrial Union No. 1 in the plant during 1935, the Campbell Co. had remained unorganized for several years. U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Local No. 80 had been chartered in Camden in the fall of 1937 with a small membership, mainly in the mechanical and maintenance department of the company. During the next 2½ years this local won union contracts in several nonagricultural firms in Camden, such as the Knox Gelatine Co., F. L. Hazelquist Co., the Siegel Cigar and Consolidated Cigar Cos. The Campbell Soup Co. persistently opposed unionization, by forming company unions, initiating employee-welfare programs, and granting conciliatory wage increases. Local No. 80 on its part waged a major campaign to organize the firm, which it considered the key enterprise in the entire food-processing industry of the east coast. Other C.I.O. affiliates aided Local No. 80 in the drive, in which they used sound trucks and loud speakers to reach cannery workers during lunch-hour periods. Charges were filed with Federal Government agencies asserting that the company had violated the Fair Labor Standards Act and the National Labor Relations Act. In the fall of 1940 U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Local No. 194 won recognition in a NLRB poll in the Campbell Co.'s Chicago plant.⁶⁶ Soon afterward Local No. 80 won recognition and a signed union contract in the Camden plant, covering several thousand workers.⁶⁷

At the same time Local No. 56 of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America (A.F. of L.) announced the signing of a closed-shop contract with the Seabrook Farms Inc., the grower-employer company at which the major field workers' strike under radical union leadership took place in 1934. The agreement covered some 500 year-round employees and several thousand seasonal workers. It provided a minimum wage of 35 cents per hour, average wage increases of 10 to 20 percent for various categories of work, seniority rights, guaranty of year-round employment for regular workers, and a ban on strikes pending arbitration.⁶⁸

The C.I.O., which had been making some attempt to organize the Seabrook Farms, assailed the A.F. of L. contract and announced that it would seek to have it set aside by the NLRB on the ground that the union was "company-dominated."⁶⁹

This was the turning point in the U.C.A.P.A.W.A.'s campaign in the northeastern States. It marked the end of the union's attempts to organize farm workers and its concentration on unionizing urban workers in industries more or less remotely allied to agriculture.

⁶⁶See footnote, p. 354.

⁶⁷U.C.A.P.A.W.A. News, Vol. I, No. 8, May-June 1940 (p. 6); Vol. I, No. 9, July-August 1940 (p. 7); Vol. I, No. 4, October 1939 (p. 11); Vol. I, No. 10, September-October 1940 (p. 4); and (special Camden issue) April 1941 (p. 5).

⁶⁸Specifically, the agreement provided the following: Guaranties of year-round employment, 1 week's vacation with pay, wage increases of 10 to 20 percent, free meals and farm clothing to harvest workers, closed shops, seniority rights, promotional preference, guaranty of jobs during military service or during illness not exceeding 1 year, arbitration to eliminate strikes, and self-renewal of contract annually. (Philadelphia Record, March 15, 1941; New York Herald Tribune, March 15, 1941.)

⁶⁹New York Herald Tribune, March 15, 1941.

CHAPTER XX.—Farm-Labor Unionism in New England

New England is usually pictured as a highly urbanized and industrialized region in which for a long time farming as a way of life has been declining. The land for the most part is hilly and stumpy, and thus unsuitable for the modern mechanized techniques of cultivating and harvesting cash crops on specialized large-scale farms. The typical New England farmer is popularly conceived to be an individualist, who only with the greatest thrift, perseverance, and hard work can manage to wrest a livelihood for himself and his family from the stony soil he owns.

Two crop areas in particular do not fit this description of New England agriculture. One is the Connecticut River Valley of central Connecticut and southwestern Massachusetts, where tobacco is grown intensively on large tracts or plantations owned by nonresident cigar-manufacturing corporations. Labor required to harvest and cure this crop is recruited mainly from nearby cities, such as Hartford and Springfield. The second crop area is the eastern section of Massachusetts, particularly Plymouth and Barnstable Counties, in the Cape Cod region, where more than 70 percent of the world's supply of cranberries is produced. Though not controlled to the same degree by absentee owners or held in such large units as plantation tobacco, the cranberry industry is fully as dependent upon large supplies of seasonal labor for harvesting. Less accessible to cities, it draws its labor supply chiefly from year-round residents of nearby small towns in Cape Cod. A few workers migrate seasonally to the area from such cities as Providence, R. I., and Boston and New Bedford, Mass.

The tobacco plantations in the Connecticut Valley and the cranberry bogs in the Cape Cod region, in common with many intensive agricultural areas during the early thirties, were the scenes of sporadic and violent strikes. These provoked considerable group conflict, and their settlement required the intervention of State government agencies. However, no vigorous and sustained labor movement comparable to that of California developed among seasonal agricultural workers in New England.

Cranberry Strikes in Massachusetts

Cranberry Bogs of the Cape Cod Region

The cranberry industry is in many ways unique. Both the location and the size of its operating units have been restricted by the crop's requirements of particular soil and climate. Massachusetts has for many years produced between two-thirds and three-fourths of the world's supply of cranberries. Since the First World War, almost three-fourths of the State's output, or more than half of the world's output, has been produced by Plymouth County alone.¹

Cranberries are grown on peat or muck land, the best of which is in Plymouth County. There, supplies of sand as well as water are accessible

¹C. D. Stevens, H. J. Franklin, et al.: *The Cranberry Industry in Massachusetts*, Bulletin No. 332, State Experiment Station (East Wareham, Mass.), June 1936, (pp. 34-35); *The Cape Cod Cranberry Industry*, Pamphlet of Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Association, Wareham, Mass., 1935 (pp. 6, 7).

for the periodic flooding required for cultivation. The total cost of building a bog ranges from \$662 to \$1,262 per acre.² The size of bogs is limited by the various processes required for profitable cultivation and harvesting. "Other things being equal," according to Franklin, "small bogs pay better than large ones."³ Thus, in 1934 approximately 45 percent of the 1,313 holdings contained less than 3 acres of land, and 80 percent had less than 10 acres.⁴

A trend toward larger units nevertheless has been evident for many years in cranberry bogs, as in other types of specialty farms. This concentration has taken the form of expanding ownership over scattered tracts, rather than expanding size of producing land units. A bulletin of the Massachusetts Agricultural Experiment Station in 1936 reported that "the ownership of a large part of the bog acreage is concentrated in relatively few hands and * * * the tendency in this direction is continuing."⁴ From 1924 to 1934 the number of bog holdings decreased by 38.8 percent, and the average size of holdings increased by 58.8 percent. By 1934, the 95 holdings of 25 or more acres constituted over 58 percent of the entire cranberry acreage of the State, while the 595 holdings of less than 3 acres made up less than 6 percent of the total.⁴

The process of concentration has been most noticeable in Plymouth County; by 1934 that county contained 32 of the 41 holdings of 50 acres or more, 14 of the 19 holdings of 100 acres or more, and 5 of the 7 holdings containing 200 acres or more.⁵ Labor troubles and strikes during the early thirties occurred particularly in these larger holdings, a number of which were owned by important business and financial interests such as the Ocean Spray Cranberry Preserving Co., the Federal Cranberry Co., the O. D. Makepeace Co., Ellis & Atwood, Slocum-Gibbs Co., Benjamin & Stanley, and A. H. Griffiths.⁶

The high seasonality of employment in the cranberry crop was brought out clearly in a survey made in 1934. There were 560 year-round employees for the entire industry in Massachusetts, but 15,570 workers were hired for picking and 4,548 for sorting, these two operations lasting from 5 to 6 weeks during September and October. In Plymouth County alone, 343 were year-round employees, while 10,853 were hired for picking and 2,862 for sorting.⁷ Most of the temporary workers lived in or near small towns in the cranberry area, working at a variety of odd jobs or subsisting on relief during off-season months. Almost all were natives of the Cape Verde Islands. These people, known as Bravas, are predominantly Negro in blood with a minor strain of Portuguese.

A substantial minority of the seasonal workers in the cranberry bogs during the early thirties came from other areas of New England. Many were urban workers displaced from various industries by depression and unemployment. This was the element considered primarily responsible

²H. J. Franklin: *Cranberry Growing in Massachusetts*, Bulletin No. 371 of State Experiment Station, June, 1940 (p. 19).

³*Idem* (p. 8). The care of large, compact bogs and the harvesting of their crops is disproportionately costly, because it takes more time to wheel sand to the center of the bog and to bring the berries from the center; also, most of the bog operations call for more tramping over and consequent injury to the vines on large blocky areas. The greater prevalence of the black-headed fireworm on the large bogs further limits their success. The natural foe of the pest take longer to reach the center of a large, compact bog in effective numbers than to reach the center of a small one.

⁴Stevens, Franklin, et al.: *The Cranberry Industry in Massachusetts*, op. cit. (p. 8).

⁵*Idem* (p. 7).

⁶Middleboro Gazette. September 15, 1933 (p. 1); Brockton Enterprise, September 29, 1931 (p. 10).

⁷Stevens, Franklin, et al., op. cit. (p. 12).

for the series of strikes in Plymouth County during those years. Portuguese Negroes, or Bravas, furnished a large part of the labor supply in unskilled and semiskilled urban industrial occupations; many of them were longshoremen, hod carriers and common laborers in construction work in such cities as New Bedford and Providence. Seasonal work in these trades dovetailed to some degree with harvest jobs in the cranberry crop.

Bravas were relatively well unionized in their urban employments. They composed a large part of the membership in such organizations as the International Hod Carriers, Building and Common Laborers' Union and the International Longshoremen's Association. The principal officers and more than 60 percent of the rank and file in the Providence local of the I.L.A. were claimed to be Bravas.⁸ Such workers, accustomed to relatively high wages and special concessions in the form of overtime rates, union recognition, job stewards, and grievance committees, resented their disadvantaged position in the cranberry bogs during the depression years. A minority consequently attempted to transplant urban union wage and employment standards to the rural region of Cape Cod.

Cranberry growers usually paid harvest workers by the hour rather than by piece rates, as the crop required care in picking in order to avoid spoilage and waste. Bonuses were often paid as a means of hastening the work or of retaining crews.⁹ A wide variation in wage rates, which ranged from 35 cents to 75 cents per hour, caused widespread dissatisfaction among the seasonal workers, culminating in sporadic outbreaks during the early thirties.

Cranberry prices fell drastically during this period. From 1930 to 1931 they dropped approximately 40 percent and by 1933 they had reached the lowest level since prewar years.¹⁰ Wage rates fell correspondingly, under the combined pressure of low prices for the crop and increasing competition for jobs among a growing army of unemployed. Lack of standardization in wage rates and uncertainty of earnings because of weather hazards were additional irritants for the worker. The minimum wage generally adopted during the 1933 season, for instance, was 40 cents per hour. Some growers paid 45 cents and some even 50 cents, while others paid bonuses of various amounts. Growers with more comfortable housing facilities could hold their crews at lower rates. Prolonged rains which interrupted operations and made pickers idle reduced their earnings. Transients who had to rent their quarters were particularly hard hit.¹¹ Local laborers who owned their own houses and sometimes had small garden plots were not so handicapped. According to the Middleboro Gazette of September 15, 1933:

*** the 40-cent wage may be eclipsed by a long rain. A 5- to 6-hour day on the average is about the best that can be expected, and when this is reduced, as it is in rainy seasons, the employee has good grounds for dissatisfaction.

⁸Field notes.

⁹H. J. Franklin: *Cranberry Growing in Massachusetts* (p. 37).

¹⁰Stevens, Franklin, et al.: *The Cranberry Industry in Massachusetts* (p. 20).

¹¹In common with many agricultural areas, housing for transients in the cranberry region was often inadequate, since growers hesitated to make substantial outlays for facilities which were to be used for only a few weeks of the year.

STRIKE OF 1931

The first strike to occur among cranberry pickers in the Cape Cod region was a small, brief, spontaneous walk-out involving some 150 to 200 workers on several bogs belonging to the Ocean Spray Cranberry Preserving Co. It began on September 28, 1931, in the vicinity of Halifax, and spread to other bogs belonging to the company in Bryantville, Monponsett, and Plympton. The strikers sought to raise wage rates 20 to 25 cents above the prevailing 50 cents per hour. The strike ended in 2 days with no gains, after the company management in a meeting with labor representatives stressed the fact that the price of cranberries had dropped from \$10 to \$12 per barrel in 1930 to \$4 to \$6 in 1931. Unlike later strikes, this one was accompanied by little violence. Only one arrest was made for "trespassing."¹²

STRIKE OF 1933

The strike of 1933 began on September 7, when about 300 organized pickers on one of the larger bogs demanded an increase of from 20 cents to 25 cents per hour over the announced wage rates. At the annual pre-harvest meeting of the New England Cranberry Sales Co., cooperatively owned by berry growers, it had been unanimously voted (but purposely not recorded) that 40 cents per hour be considered a "fair minimum wage" under prevailing conditions.¹³ Next day, September 8, the strike spread to include approximately 1,200 pickers on 15 of the largest bogs in Plymouth County.¹⁴

The movement was initiated by organizers from Boston, New Bedford, and Providence, among them two white organizers named Fred Wood and Daniel McIntosh. They formed the Cape Cod Cranberry Pickers Union and applied for a charter from the International Hod Carriers, Building and Common Laborers Union.¹⁵

The leading roles played by these outsiders aroused the strong antagonism of local communities. The Springfield (Mass.) Union in its issue of September 12, 1933, reported that "Cape Codders, famed for their spirit of independence, entrenched themselves to drive agitators from their cranberry bogs." One hundred citizens, 50 of them from Wareham and others from Plymouth, Middleboro, Roxbury, and Winthrop, formed a special police force after one prominent grower reported that "agitators had openly threatened to burn some of the bogs." Selectman Theo Robinson of Wareham expressed himself as having "no objection to duly authorized, decent representatives of labor," but added that he did "object most strenuously to the type of agitator who has been invading our bogs trying to incite the workers."¹⁶

Tactics used by the strikers were roughly similar to those used in the large cotton strikes of California and Arizona during 1933. Caravans of

¹²Reports of State Board of Conciliation and Arbitration, Boston, 1931; also Brockton Enterprise, September 29, 1931 (p. 10).

¹³Middleboro Gazette, September 8, 1933 (p. 1).

¹⁴Reports of State Board of Conciliation and Arbitration, Boston, 1933.

¹⁵Several grower-employers said that the pickers were first organized by a local Brava of somewhat "shady" character who ran an employment agency, that he started the cranberry pickers' union as a "racket" to collect dues, and enlisted large numbers by making extravagant promises; and that when the movement had attained considerable momentum, Wood and McIntosh stepped in to take control and affiliate the local union with the A. F. of L.

¹⁶Springfield (Mass.) Union, September 12, 1933.

"guerilla pickets" visited bogs to persuade those at work to join the strike. On a few occasions they attempted to stop trucks on the highways in order to prevent delivery of berries to storehouses. This tactic failed when guards armed with shotguns were placed on the trucks.¹⁷ Union organizers concentrated on the largest bogs and bog owners, who were felt to have a predominant influence in setting the general wage scale. Most prominent among these were the Federal Cranberry Co., A. D. Makepeace Co., Slocum-Gibbs Co., Ellis & Atwood, Benjamin & Stanley, and A. H. Griffiths, most of whom were in the southern part of Plymouth County in the vicinities of South Carver and Wareham.¹⁸

Excitement reached a high pitch in South Carver on September 12, when 120 strikers clashed with a group of pickers at work. In the course of the battle 4 pickers were reported shot and wounded, and Selectman Herbert A. Stanley, owner of the bog, was severely beaten. Police were called from surrounding towns, 35 State troopers were rushed to the scene, and 4 strikers were arrested.¹⁸

The chief of police and a sergeant in Middleboro drew their revolvers, stopped a caravan of 10 automobiles containing 55 strikers (part of a caravan of 22 automobiles patrolling the cranberry area) and arrested the group.¹⁹

Strikes were fewer in this northern section of the cranberry area, however, as the bogs were smaller and more scattered. The only approach to a walk-out took place on the Federal Cranberry Co. bog, where pickers united in a "round robin" to the manager demanding 80 cents per hour. When this was refused, they collected their pay checks and quit.¹⁹

The strike finally disintegrated during the last week of September under the weight of heavy fines and numerous arrests. By that time 75 strikers had been arraigned in court and fined for trespassing and intimidation.²⁰ Daniel J. McIntosh and Fred Wood, organizers of the Cape Cod Cranberry Pickers Union, were sentenced to 60 days each in the Plymouth County jail by Judge Washburn of Wareham, on charges of obtaining signatures and money "under false pretenses."¹⁹ They had collected initiation fees of \$1 for membership in the union, which they had claimed to be affiliated to the American Federation of Labor before a charter had actually been received. When the charter was granted, the organizers were released.

The Report of the Selectmen of Wareham for 1933 upheld the arrests and convictions of strikers in the Wareham court, and expressed the view that it was "a sad reflection upon our jury system that such success was not attained in the superior court"²¹ (which released many arrested strikers). The concern and indignation which local townspeople felt over the turbulence of the strike was emphasized by the selectmen. They were critical of "police laxity," particularly of State troopers, and expressed the view that—

¹⁷Middleboro Gazette, September 15, 1933 (p. 1).

¹⁸Springfield Union, September 13, 1933 (p. 1).

¹⁹Middleboro Gazette, September 15, 1933 (p. 1).

²⁰Idem. Nineteen "agitators" were arrested on charges of intimidating pickers on the bog of Clerk of Court W. H. Hurley, and others were involved in riots on the Makepeace and Stanley bogs.

²¹Annual Report of the Town of Wareham, 1933, Courier Press (Wareham), Report of Selectmen: The Strike (p. 143).

* * * had the comprehension and attitude of the selectmen's office been catered to relative to the immediate stamping out of the unhealthy situation, less intimidation and terrorizing of the Portuguese and others would have ensued, and it is quite likely that shooting affairs, clubbing, and attempted burning of buildings would have been less in evidence. (Annual Report of the Town of Wareham, 1933, p. 144.)

These authorities predicted that—

* * * unless efforts at proper education and clearer vision of the situation is in evidence by cranberry bog owners, and through more serious comprehension by both public and court officials, victimizing troublemakers are not eliminated, this heretofore peaceful section is to have an insidious obstacle to law, order, peace and prosperity in its system. (Annual Report of the Town of Wareham, 1933, p. 145.)

STRIKE OF 1934

The prediction of the selectmen came true the following year. In 1934 a strike of cranberry pickers again broke out on a large scale, attended by strife and legal suppression. This time both sides—growers and law-enforcement officers on the one hand and pickers on the other—were better organized and prepared.

The Cape Cod Cranberry Pickers Union had obtained its charter from New Bedford, as Local No. 368, International Hod Carriers, Building and Common Laborers Union (A.F. of L.) and had opened temporary headquarters in the town of Onset. Union demands were formulated in a contract submitted to the larger growers, who strongly opposed them; they included a minimum wage of 50 cents per hour for sanding, weeding, and all bog work other than picking, a rate of 75 cents per hour for "scooping" (picking), with 15 cents per measure for hand picking and 12 cents for "snaps." The requests most disliked by growers were those calling for union recognition and a closed shop, and, particularly, a steward paid by the employers but chosen by the union to settle all disputes between growers and pickers. The dispute was to be carried to union headquarters at Onset when the steward was unable to perform this function.²²

Bog owners and local authorities prepared for trouble. Several growers in Carver hired special officers to remain on the bogs during the season, and others were to be available for instant call by the chief of police.²²

A general strike involving approximately 1,500 pickers was called on September 3, after the picking season had begun. It immediately affected 41 bogs near the towns of Carver, Marion, Tremont, Wareham, Rochester, and Middleboro.²³

During the first few days there was no violence, as regular officers and special police armed with guns, tear gas, and clubs were kept in readiness.²⁴ The only untoward incidents were the arrests of five strikers for trespassing, and of two union officials for intimidation. The latter flew a plane over several bogs to signal pickers and persuade them to leave their work.²⁵ For this misdemeanor among others, union organizer Fred Wood was fined \$200 on charges filed by Chiefs of Police Churchill of Wareham and Smith of Carver.²⁶

Local authorities used methods reminiscent of those in harvest strikes of California. The chief of police and the chairman of the board of health of the city of Carver closed a large boarding house of 150 people, known

²²Wareham Courier, August 31, 1934 (p. 6).

²³Boston Post, September 4, 1934; Washington (D. C.) Star, September 4, 1934.

²⁴Boston Post, September 4, 1934.

²⁵Wareham Courier, September 7, 1934; Fall River Herald News, September 5, 1934.

²⁶Wareham Courier, September 14, 1934.

to be the local headquarters for strikers, on the ground that it constituted a health and fire hazard.²⁷

Violence first occurred during the third week of September, when a group of strikers stoned workers on the Hammond bog at Onset and severely injured the owner's son.²⁸ A group of strikers was reported later to have visited the nearby J. J. Beaton bog and tipped over barrels of cranberries awaiting shipment. Windows were broken and stones thrown at strikebreakers before the crowd was dispersed.²⁸

Newspapers throughout Massachusetts and other States publicized the strike. Representatives of the State Board of Arbitration and Conciliation came to Plymouth County to help settle the dispute, although there had been no formal request for their services.²⁹ The board chairman, after conferring with both growers and strikers, made certain suggestions for the settlement of the strike: That the controversy cease immediately; that the employees return to work without discrimination as business and employment conditions warranted; and that the board immediately make a survey of conditions in the industry relative to wage rates particularly, and have full power to make such adjustments as conditions warranted.

In response to these suggestions, J. J. Beaton, president of the Cape Cod Cranberry Association, claimed that his organization could not bind the growers. Being a marketing association only, it had no authority to act as a group representative or spokesman for the 1,000 or more grower members.³⁰ Union officials, however, accepted the board's offer. The strike was called off shortly after two allegedly incendiary screen-house fires on September 15 threatened to bring further suppression of the strikers.³¹ Their position was becoming hopeless. Growers from the first had claimed that they were having little difficulty in harvesting their crops. In a period of severe unemployment they were able to obtain all the pickers they needed in spite of the efforts of union pickets.³¹ The effectiveness of the walk-out lay in its attracting public attention rather than in stopping harvest operations. The State Board of Conciliation and Arbitration reported that "while this strike was affecting the industry to a limited extent only, it was occasioning a serious condition of disturbance in the locality."³²

Local authorities were even more disturbed by the strike of 1934 than they had been in the previous year. Selectmen of the town of Wareham, in commenting upon this "second appearance of devitalizing agitators," concluded that—

* * * this communistic serpent will doubtless infest our hitherto peaceful community until Congress disfranchises, and literally regards, agitators who have never proved themselves of any worth to themselves or society, as undesirable citizens.³³

The selectmen even claimed that "one white American of communistic or maniacal trend * * * at a public meeting suggested that a bomb be placed under the Town House!"³³

The failure of the strikes, in both years, was due apparently to inadequate and faulty preparatory organization. The militant faction, pri-

²⁷Boston Globe, September 6, 1934.

²⁸Brockton Enterprise, September 12, 1934.

²⁹Boston Herald, September 11, 1934.

³⁰Wareham Courier, September 14, 1933.

³¹Idem, September 21, 1934.

³²Annual Report of Massachusetts Department of Labor and Industries, Boston, 1934 (p. 41).

³³Annual Report of the Town of Wareham, 1934 (Courier Press, Wareham), Report of Selectmen (p. 423).

marily seasonal transient workers from urban centers like Providence and New Bedford, was a minority. They tried to carry out strikes in the face of passive opposition from the majority, who were local residents. The latter for the most part had had little or no experience with unions.

The proper way to achieve collective bargaining with growers in the Cape Cod cranberry region, as pointed out later by several union leaders, would have been to organize more slowly and carefully. A series of organizing meetings should have been held well before the harvest season, so that the majority of workers were well unified before dues were collected from them. Once a stable organization had been established, the time would have been propitious for formulating reasonable demands. Instead of attempting to transform conditions overnight with such demands as a wage increase of 50 to 60 percent and a union shop, the union should have worked for moderate gains within the realm of possible achievement.³⁴

Organization weaknesses in the movement were evident from the first. Dues were collected before a charter had been granted, leaving the union vulnerable to legal attack. Lack of adequate control over individual members, as well as indiscretion on the part of the leading organizers, led to numerous undisciplined and illegal acts. These continually weakened the union through causing the arrest of its most active members, and exhausted the union treasury through heavy fines and court costs. Attempts to enforce urban trade-union standards in a farming industry only served to unite growers and local authorities even more solidly as an opposition group. The union was organized by outsiders and was composed predominantly of workers belonging to a racial minority. It almost inevitably faced intense hostility from communities in which the most prominent citizens, many of them holding public office, were themselves grower-employers.

The Cape Code Cranberry Pickers Union soon became inactive as a result of strike failures and heavy legal costs which drained the treasury. The National Committee to Aid Agricultural Workers, and later the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America attempted unsuccessfully to revive unionism among cranberry workers in Massachusetts.

The State Department of Labor and Industries, as had been agreed upon in the strike settlement, made a survey of labor conditions in the cranberry industry during 1935. Conferences were held with cranberry growers to urge them to eliminate certain evils and adopt recommendations made by the department to the Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Association. These were listed as—

* * * sanitation in general: The furnishing of pure drinking water and the safeguarding of the water supply; the methods employed for sewage disposal; sleeping quarters in buildings provided for pickers and other workers; kitchen quarters, and other requirements of this nature * * * compliance of laws regarding school attendance of children, providing suitable medical supplies for workers on bogs, prohibiting the employment of girls under 18 years of age at scooping berries, prohibiting the carrying of filled boxes by women and children, and requiring more uniformity in wage rates.³⁵

The investigation, according to the department's report, "disclosed that much cooperation was given by the employers in maintaining the agreement between the Cranberry Growers Association and the Department of Labor and Industries."³⁵

³⁴Field notes from interviews.

³⁵Annual Report of Massachusetts Department of Labor and Industries, Boston, 1935 (p. 35).

Tobacco Strikes in Connecticut and Massachusetts

Tobacco Plantations of the Connecticut Valley

Labor troubles in the tobacco-growing area of the Connecticut Valley in north central Connecticut and southwestern Massachusetts were more numerous and of longer duration than those in the Cape Cod cranberry bogs. Tobacco workers' strikes showed even less evidence of preliminary organization, planning, and knowledge of collective bargaining. They were sporadic outbreaks provoked by the unsatisfactory labor relations and working conditions in the industry.

Tobacco production in the Connecticut Valley is highly concentrated in a few large companies. Although "field tobacco" is grown as a cash crop by many small working farmers in the area, the more important "shade-grown" tobacco is cultivated, harvested, and cured on large-scale plantations, most of which are owned by absentee corporations with offices in New York.

The operations on tobacco plantations are highly industrialized. The methods of producing and processing the crop are like those of a factory rather than a farm. Cultivation and harvesting are carried on under "shades" or expanses of cloth which protect the plants from inclement weather. The cut tobacco is then "strung" in large sheds to be dried and cured.

Corporation-owned tobacco plantations, like other agricultural enterprises growing intensive crops on a large scale, require a great many seasonal laborers during the late summer months. Some of these at times have been recruited from other States and some from nearby industrial centers such as Hartford, Conn., and Springfield, Mass.

New England tobacco plantations would be classified definitely as sweatshops. Though they are controlled by big business interests and though many of their operations go on indoors, they have been considered agricultural enterprises by legislatures in both Connecticut and Massachusetts. Hence they have been beyond the jurisdiction of State departments of labor and industries, as well as various Federal agencies enforcing protective labor legislation. Tobacco farming pays the lowest wages of any major industry in Connecticut or Massachusetts; working conditions are highly disagreeable, because of excessive heat and humidity; and sanitary and housing facilities have long been distinctly substandard.³⁶

Tobacco companies as a consequence suffer from labor shortages during periods of relative prosperity and full employment, and find difficulty in recruiting and holding adequate labor supplies. The first serious shortage occurred during the First World War, when workers in large numbers went to war industries paying higher wages. To fill the gap, tobacco growers imported thousands of Negroes from Southern States. Indeed, according to Prof. Charles S. Johnson—

It was * * * the Connecticut tobacco fields that first experimented with Negro labor from the South, and, according to some authorities, started the immigration

³⁶Monthly Bulletin of Placement and Unemployment Compensation Division of Connecticut Department of Labor and Factory Inspection (Hartford), June 1939 (p. 2). (See appendix Q, p. 454); also, Arthur W. Stuart: Labor Conditions in the Growing of Shade Tobacco in the Connecticut River Valley, in Hearings before the Tolan Committee, Part I, New York City Hearings, July 29 to 31 (pp. 388-391).

of Negroes from the South that added a half million to northern communities scattered from New England to the Dakotas.³⁷

Several of the larger growers were themselves southerners, according to Johnson, and were partial to Negro labor from the South. To hold the workers, growers attempted to develop a plantation system modeled after that of the South, with cabins, tenements, and dormitories available for employees on the land.³⁸

It was found almost impossible to hold the crews, however. Continuous and costly importations approaching a "tidal wave of immigration" became necessary. Tobacco hands continued to leave the relatively unattractive wage and working conditions of the plantations for jobs in nearby urban industries, particularly in the building trades.³⁹

Tobacco companies turned to other sources after the war. They experimented unsuccessfully with Boy Scouts, and, during the depression of 1920 and 1921, with urban unemployed.⁴⁰ The industry had to rely for the most part upon a heterogeneous supply of marginal labor unfit for or unable to work in other nearby industries—women and children, teenage youths, and old people, as well as disadvantaged groups from other areas, such as southern Negroes.⁴¹ During the depression years of the early thirties, however, more-than-adequate labor supplies were made available by severe urban unemployment.

The trend toward concentration in the industry was evident as early as the First World War; while the acreage in tobacco increased, the number of growers decreased. At present, 18 corporations growing shade tobacco own or control approximately 6,500 intensively cultivated acres, as well as considerable capital equipment required for harvesting and processing. Competition with other tobacco areas made operations on a large scale more economical. Greater division of labor and simplification of processes in large units made feasible the employment of substandard workers at low wages.

Few attempts have been made to organize stable unions for collective bargaining in the tobacco industry of the Connecticut Valley. Its workers have been too casual, marginal, and heterogeneous to unionize effectively. Labor unrest and conflict have been manifested in high rates of labor turnover and periodic spontaneous strikes.

Few if any tobacco strikes occurred in New England during the 1920's or before. Some 62 Negroes, in the early twenties, belonged to an ineffective local of the Tobacco Workers International Union (A.F. of L.), which did not last long. The major outbreaks occurred during the thirties and involved mainly teen-age youths. The circumstances which caused them were common to many intensive agricultural areas which experienced farm-labor revolts.

The publicity attending the NRA, the new and improved wage and hour provisions, and the protection of labor's right to organize, all had a leavening effect on unions in urban industries during 1933 and 1934. The union psychology soon spread to rural areas where agricultural wage laborers were hired in sizable numbers. This happened particularly on the large tobacco plantations of the Connecticut Valley. They were in

³⁷Charles S. Johnson: *The Negro Population of Hartford* (Department of Research and Investigation, National Urban League, New York, N. Y., 1921), p. 2.

³⁸*Idem* (pp. 33, 34).

³⁹*Idem* (pp. 34, 87).

⁴⁰*Idem* (p. 98).

⁴¹Monthly Bulletin of Placement and Unemployment Compensation Division of Connecticut Department of Labor and Factory Inspection, June 1939 (p. 2).

close communication with important cities like Hartford and Springfield and hired many unemployed industrial workers.

Wages and working conditions had deteriorated considerably in the tobacco fields during those years, as heavy urban unemployment provided a more-than-adequate labor supply for grower-employers. In the 1935 Census of Agriculture, Connecticut's average wage of \$2.80 per day for hired farm labor was higher than that of any other State in the Union. In the shade-grown-tobacco fields of the Connecticut Valley, however, wage scales averaged hardly more than \$1 for a 10- to 11-hour day during 1933,⁴² while working conditions, living quarters, and sanitary facilities were very much below standard.⁴³

STRIKES OF 1933

The first strike of importance began in July 1933, and included 75 to 80 pickers on the Cullman Bros. "Indian Head" plantation, near the village of Tariffville, Conn. They demanded a "new deal," which would include increases of 50 cents a day over the prevailing scales of \$1.50, \$2, and \$2.50 (depending upon skill and function) for adults, and 25 cents per day over the general \$1 scale for youths. Most of the strikers were reported to be from this latter group, their fathers and mothers for the most part remaining at work.⁴⁴

The strikers formed torchlight parades and displayed banners in order to extend the walk-out and prevent recruiting of strikebreakers. These tactics succeeded for a time in keeping Tariffville workers from going to the Indian Head plantation in the trucks sent to pick them up. A number of workers employed at a second plantation operated by Cullman Bros. joined the strike.⁴⁵ County officials and police meanwhile made preparations to prevent violence.

Officials of the company, on the other hand, reported that word of the strike in progress had brought more job seekers than could be hired.⁴⁵ The plantation superintendent, indeed, denied that there was a strike. He stated merely that when 50 to 75 pickers had failed to report for work, he had employed others to take their places. He complained that "they've been hearing about this 40-hour-week schedule with increased wages for mill workers, but farming is something else."⁴⁴

The major weakness in the strikers' position was the result of their deferring action until nearly the end of the "first picking." Shortly after they began their walk-out, picking operations were suspended for 3 days in order to allow the leaves to ripen. The "second picking" required fewer hands.

Inexperience with collective bargaining was evident in the strikers' inability or unwillingness to form a committee to negotiate with officials

⁴²A report by the Connecticut Department of Labor and Factory Inspection had this to say about wages in the tobacco fields in 1933:

"With few exceptions, the scheduled working day was from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. with 1 hour for lunch * * *

"Leaf pickers in the fields received \$1 and \$1.25 a day. A few plantations paid \$1.50. Leaf girls in sheds were paid 75 cents and \$1 per day. Sewers worked on a piecework basis, and, on 14 of the 16 plantations inspected, they received 25 cents for stringing 20 pairs of tobacco leaves to each of 50 laths, handling 2,000 leaves in all. Weekly earnings of sewers ranged from \$6.75 to \$13.50 a week. Field bosses and teamsters received \$2 and \$2.50 a day." (Monthly Bulletin, p. 2.)

⁴³Monthly Bulletin, p. 2. (See appendix Q, p. 454.)

⁴⁴Hartford Courant, July 19, 1933 (p. 1).

⁴⁵Idem, July 20, 1933 (p. 1).

of Cullman Bros. They feared that their representatives would be fired. County Detective Hickey persuaded the strikers to allow Rev. F. J. Lorentzen, pastor and probation officer of Swinbury, Conn., to act as their representative in settling the issues.⁴⁶ The Reverend Lorentzen, together with W. J. Fitzgerald, Deputy Labor Commissioner, and a representative of Cullman Bros., subsequently conferred at the State capital.⁴⁷

The effectiveness of the strike lay in the wide attention which it focussed on the inadequate wages and the working and living conditions on tobacco plantations. Deputy Labor Commissioner Fitzgerald informed local newspapers that he was "shocked and annoyed" at the "squalor and poverty" he found in his investigations. He reported wages at such low levels as \$8.50 for 52 hours, and \$1.11 for 18 hours.⁴⁸ After the State Department of Labor expressed complaints regarding child labor, 18 of the largest companies signed a written agreement stating that no one under 14 years of age would be employed.⁴⁸

Cullman Bros. announced certain concessions to its employees in order to settle the strike, despite the objections of other growers. An increase to 25 cents per bundle in place of the prevailing 20 cents was announced for stringers (women who strung the separate tobacco leaves on cards for drying) and an increased number of workers were paid the \$1.75 per day rate. Ordinary workers continued to earn \$1.25 to \$1.50 per day.⁴⁹

The walk-out continued to spread after the 3-day recess from work and the resumption of "second picking." Approximately 100 workers employed on the Hartmann Tobacco Co.'s 250-acre plantation near North Bloomfield and Windsor, Conn., quit work on July 25, 1933, when their demands for increases from \$1.25 to \$1.75 per day were refused; 300 additional workers were forced to suspend operations.⁵⁰ In this case the strike leaders presented their demands to the board chairman of the Hartmann Co. The management promptly paid the 100 strikers and ordered them off the property. Several were forcibly removed by police officers and three were arrested.⁵¹

Negotiations with the Cullman Bros. plantation meanwhile reached a deadlock over the question of reemployment. There were now more than 100 strikers, who demanded an increase of 50 cents per day for men and boys and a further raise from 25 to 33½ cents per bundle for women stringers.⁵² The employers offered a flat 25-percent increase in rates to all employees, but the strikers refused to accept it unless their rehiring provisions were fulfilled. Reverend Lorentzen, as spokesman for the strikers, stated that he had rejected a list submitted by Cullman Bros., naming 100 men whom the company would rehire at the higher rate, because it made no provisions for a number of other strikers.⁵² On the other hand, a list submitted to the growers by strikers was rejected by employers on the ground that only 83 out of the more than 100 persons named were eligible for employment.⁵¹

A compromise agreement stipulating reemployment for 75 strikers at the 25-percent wage increase was finally reached on July 27, 1933. It was

⁴⁶Hartford Courant, July 22, 1933 (p. 1).

⁴⁷Idem, July 23, 1933 (p. 1).

⁴⁸Idem, July 25, 1933 (p. 1).

⁴⁹Idem, July 22, 1933.

⁵⁰Youthful tobacco pickers, it was reported, forced the older men to quit their jobs and chased women and girl stringers from the drying sheds where they were employed. (Hartford Courant, July 25, 1933.)

⁵¹Hartford Courant, July 26, 1933.

⁵²Idem, July 25, 1933.

hastened by two incidents which threatened to bring police action against the strikers. A cloth covering of a tobacco field was reported set afire on the Stewart plantation of the Hartmann Tobacco Co. at Windsor, where a brief strike had failed just previously.⁵³ In Tariffville two alleged Communists were arrested and held for \$1,500 bail on charges of "breach of the peace." They had attempted, it was alleged, to persuade strikers to join the International Labor Defense and to start a fight with deputy sheriffs on duty.⁵³

Similar wage increases were soon granted on several other plantations in the area, including two belonging to the American Sumatra Co. in Windsor. The county health officer of Hartford later ordered an inspection of living quarters used by tobacco workers as a result of the adverse publicity regarding conditions on the plantations.⁵³

Four days after this settlement, strikes occurred at the Consolidated Cigar Corp. plantation in Fairview, and its subsidiary, the Silberman & Kahn plantation in Chicopee Falls, both in Massachusetts. One hundred boys and girls employed as pickers, planters, and sorters demanded an increase from the prevailing \$1.10 to \$1.50 rates to \$1.75 per 10-hour day.⁵⁴ The management refused and recruited new workers to take the place of 50 striking boys hitherto employed as pickers. Special company guards and local police thwarted attempts at picketing.⁵⁵

The employers soon found it impossible to hire and keep new workers. A group of 50 boys imported from Holyoke to replace the local strikers walked out in a body after 1 day's work. They declared that the wages were inadequate for long hours under tobacco nets, which they termed "Turkish baths." A second company of 50 boys, recruited in Westfield and brought to the plantation in trucks, refused to remain at their jobs when they learned that a strike was in effect.⁵⁶

The Consolidated Cigar Corp. was forced finally to come to terms, granting compromise gains to the 50 striking pickers of the Chicopee Falls plantation. Pay increases of 25 cents per day were granted, raising former wage scales of from \$1.25 to \$1.50 per 11-hour day to from \$1.50 to \$1.75. The company announced also that it was preparing to comply with the NRA code for the tobacco industry, which set a scale of \$14 minimum for a 40-hour week for employees 16 years of age and over. As an incidental result of the walk-out, police investigated strikers' complaints that the water on the plantations was not fit to drink, and later submitted a report to the State Board of Health.⁵⁶

MISCELLANEOUS STRIKES, 1934-35

No further outbreaks of importance occurred on the tobacco plantations of the Connecticut Valley until the summer of 1936. The only other strike of agricultural or allied workers to achieve much publicity in New England (in addition to that involving cranberry pickers in the Cape Cod region) was a dramatic but short-lived walk-out in April 1934 of 300 floral and greenhouse workers at the A. N. Pierson Co. plant in Cromwell, Conn. These workers claimed to have formed the first horticultural workers' union in the country. Shortly after organizing, the members

⁵³Hartford Courant, July 27, 1933.

⁵⁴Springfield Evening Union, July 31, 1933 (p. 1).

⁵⁵Idem, August 1, 1933 (p. 12).

⁵⁶Idem, August 2, 1933 (p. 8).

submitted demands for wage increases and recognition. When the company refused, the employees suddenly walked out on a prearranged signal, leaving cut flowers in the aisles where they had been dropped.

During the strike Pat Morrissey, secretary of the Middleton Central Labor Union, protested to the Federal Government against the National Reemployment Bureau's policy of furnishing strikebreakers. Some clashes occurred on picket lines, in the course of which two strikers were arrested for intimidation. The walk-out was settled through mediation by the U. S. Department of Labor. The strikers won neither the wage increase nor the union recognition demanded. They were merely given a promise by the company that strikers would be rehired without discrimination.⁵⁷

Tobacco-plantation workers were enjoying rising wage rates as a result of increased opportunities for employment in the cities and a consequent lessening of the farm-labor surplus. Labor organizers in 1935 reported that most plantations in Hartford County were raising wages 25 cents per day above the 1934 level. Some plantations, it was claimed, were importing Negro laborers from Southern States in large numbers.⁵⁸

Organizers meanwhile were attempting to form unions in the principal tobacco centers. Farm workers' unions were created in Hartford and Bloomfield, and money was raised for federal labor union charters from the A.F. of L.⁵⁹ Several small strikes were reported to have won improved working conditions. Most of the union members were youths ranging from 11 to 20 years of age. Their militancy evidently impressed one radical organizer favorably. "It was an eye opener to me," he reported, "to hear youngsters not more than 14 grit their teeth as they denounced capitalists and this system of exploitation."⁵⁹

STRIKES IN 1936 AND 1938

Strikes on the tobacco plantations during the late thirties were rather in the nature of spontaneous collective efforts to take advantage of labor shortages, than sporadic protests against depressed conditions of employment. During August 1936, after one brief preliminary walk-out, some 300 boys from 14 to 18 years of age struck on 3 plantations—of the American Sumatra, the Hathaway & Sten, and the Shepherd tobacco companies, in Westfield, Mass. The strikers' demands were for better wages and hours. They stated that the working cards issued them by school-department officials had called for a maximum of 8 hours per day, but complained that in many cases they had to work 9 to 9½ hours.⁶⁰ Pickers sought a minimum wage of \$2 per day as against the prevailing \$1.50 to \$1.75, while haulers demanded an increase to a \$2.25 to \$2.50 scale from the prevailing \$1.50 to \$2.00.⁶¹ Both groups were reported well organized, marching in a body through the city from East Main Street to Kane Park to spread the strike to other company plantations in Westfield's East Side. Police were called when minor violence occurred. One striker was arrested and fined \$10 for trespassing.⁶¹

The walk-out ended in a compromise agreement within 2 days, after a conference had been held between the plantation officials and the acting

⁵⁷Hartford Courant, April 11, 1934 (p. 1).

⁵⁸Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 1, August 1935 (p. 1).

⁵⁹Idem, Vol. I, No. 3, October 1935 (p. 5).

⁶⁰Springfield Union, August 17, 1936 (p. 1).

⁶¹Idem, August 18, 1936 (p. 1).

chief of police of Westfield. Strikers were granted a flat wage increase of 25 cents per day and were rehired without discrimination.⁶²

The next strike of importance in this industry occurred 2 years later. In August 1938, 225 employees walked out of the Bloomfield, Conn., plantation of the Hartford Tobacco Co. The strikers again were reported to be almost entirely boys and youths.⁶² Wages had continued to rise during a period of prosperity and increasing employment. The workers in this strike demanded an increase of 50 cents per day above the prevailing wage rates, which by this time had reached a standard \$2.00 to \$2.25 per day.⁶² A settlement was reached within 3 days, with a compromise increase of 25 cents per day.

THE U.C.A.P.A.W.A., 1940

Agricultural and allied workers took part in no organized action of importance in New England for the next 2 years. Two unsuccessful spontaneous strikes of 30 potato pickers and 50 apple pickers in Hampden and Berkshire Counties, Mass., each lasted a week, during September 1938 and September 1939, respectively.⁶³

The United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America began to organize the Connecticut Valley tobacco industry in 1940. Early in the year U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Local No. 140 was organized for Hartford, Conn., and vicinity. The union centered its activities on the "shade" tobacco plantations controlled by 18 large corporations, and purposely avoided "leaf" tobacco for fear of antagonizing small farmers.

In contrast to previous policy in this area, organizers concentrated primarily on Negro laborers imported from the South, as they could be enlisted more easily. They had been exploited, to begin with, through a contractor system of recruiting, common along the Atlantic coast. Many of them had come from the same community in the South and had traveled together continuously, often working together in homogeneous gangs. Each gang usually had a "natural leader"—a student, preacher, or the like—who, once won over to the union, could swing the group with him.⁶⁴ White workers, by contrast, were found to be divided by age as well as by religion and nationality, and were more individualistic.

District union officials conducted an organizing drive in fields, sheds, and warehouses, with the announced objective of raising the standard wage from rates of 25 cents to 30 cents per hour to a rate of 35 cents. The union was soon blocked, however, by organized opposition from growers and law-enforcement officers. Seventeen Negro workers were discharged because of union affiliation, and three organizers, including the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. district representative, Leonard Farmer, were arrested and held for trial.

They were first charged with "trespassing," when they visited workers in their living quarters on a Windsor tobacco plantation during the organizing campaign. Since the tobacco workers had paid rent for their lodging and, being tenants under the law, were entitled to have friends and business acquaintances (including union organizers) visit them.

⁶²Springfield Union, August 11, 1938 (p. 1).

⁶³Jesiah C. Folsom: *Labor Disputes in Agriculture, 1937-38* (unpublished), U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington.

⁶⁴Interviews and field notes, May 1941.

the arrest was illegal. The organizers were released after each had posted a bond of \$100.⁶⁵

The district representative was then arrested again on charges of "defacing public property" in violation of a statute. He and his helpers had posted signs on telephone poles along a public highway, urging tobacco workers to organize and join local No. 140 of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Despite the fact that posters had similarly been placed by local Democratic and Republican party members during the presidential campaign of 1940, the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. organizer was held criminally responsible. Judge Edwin M. Ryan of Hartford, who was associated with attorney Paul M. Patten in defense of Farmer, told the court that the case was one "suppressing free speech under the guise of criminal prosecution," and was a "move to suppress the organizing of labor." He added that he would attack the constitutionality of the statute.⁶⁶

The union was not maintained, although the case was subsequently dropped and the organizer freed. As in other areas during this period, the C.I.O. thereafter abandoned agriculture in order to concentrate its energies and resources on organizing the expanding defense industries.

GENERAL STATUS OF TOBACCO WORKERS

Tobacco plantations in the Connecticut Valley have experienced many of the same types of labor troubles as have large-scale farm enterprises in other regions which rely on large seasonal labor supplies. With the same legal status as agriculture, they have had a competitive advantage over other industries in being able to hire labor at wage levels and working conditions far below the minimum standards imposed upon urban business establishments by State and Federal law.

This gives rise to unrest, particularly among laborers seasonally recruited in large numbers from cities, which periodically culminates in agitation and strikes. The large proportion of school children employed on New England tobacco plantations, and the leading part they have had in various strikes, have been unique among employment practices and labor relations in the production of intensive cash crops. The situation is to be explained largely by the fact that child workers have been employed mainly on large plantations, where labor relationships are most impersonal and differences between employees and employers are most likely to arise.

It is impossible to measure the effects that sporadic collective action has had in raising wages and improving working conditions. The most favorable results perhaps lay in attracting the attention of public agencies to the unsatisfactory conditions on the plantations. The Connecticut Department of Labor and Factory Inspection, while having no legal jurisdiction and facing considerable resistance from rural areas,⁶⁷ has been

⁶⁵Hartford Courant, July 11, 1940 (p. 14).

⁶⁶Idem, July 17, 1940 (p. 6).

⁶⁷Large agricultural interests like the tobacco plantations wield a disproportionate influence in the State political scene. Small rural towns tend to be dominated by tobacco farms, as these are the main source of income. Rural areas in Connecticut particularly tend to have more political power than do heavily populated urban centers. Through an old statute of the seventeenth century, the lower house in the State legislature is composed of 2 members elected from each of the towns chartered at that date. Thus, at the present time, there are towns with a few hundred people that have the same representation as a city like Hartford, with a population running into hundreds of thousands. The labor movement, concentrated in large industrial centers, is particularly weakened by this situation.

able to bring slow but noticeable improvements through its annual investigations and publicity. In conferences with organized tobacco growers it has endeavored unofficially for several years to enforce certain minimum standards regarding child labor, housing, sanitation, working conditions, and transportation.⁶⁸ Employment conditions still remain much inferior to those of other industries in New England, because the effectiveness of the State Department of Labor is limited. To quote the report of one field investigator—

* * * these improvements have not by any means been general. Conditions menacing the physical and moral health of the workers still exist. Farm work, no matter how highly industrialized, is outside the jurisdiction of the State labor laws. Until legislative action is taken, granting regulatory powers to an administrative agency, it is only through the cooperation of the growers that abuses can be corrected and working and living standards in the industry raised. (Monthly Bulletin, June 1939, p. 2.)

⁶⁸See Appendix Q (p. 454).

CHAPTER XXI.—Farm-Labor Unionism in the Great Lakes Region

The Great Lakes region of the Middle West, like the Wheat Belt, usually has been considered the traditional home of the family farmer and the hired man. Its farming is more diversified than that of other areas in the United States, and the scale of farm operations on the average is not large. In contrast to regions which specialize in one or a few intensively grown commercial crops, its demand for agricultural labor for the most part is not highly seasonal.

Milk, the farm product in which this region specializes, is characterized by stable year-round markets and employment relations. The dairy hand in the past was a special type of farm hand rather than a seasonally employed transient or casual. Milk production in later years became more mechanized and concentrated in larger units, to meet the growing demands for cheese and other processed milk foods, as well as for fresh milk in the large cities bordering the Great Lakes. Dairy workers consequently became a distinct type of labor, more industrialized in their relations with employers than were other year-round farm employees.

A few limited areas in the Great Lakes region in recent years have been specializing in cash crops which require great influxes of migratory and casual labor for brief jobs of cultivating and harvesting. Groups of seasonal agricultural workers in the more centrally located States have developed regular routes of migration running north and south, roughly paralleling those along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. Farms in certain sections of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio regularly hire migrants coming from Southern States to harvest perishable fruit and vegetable crops grown for canneries and urban markets.

Strikes and other labor conflicts have been few on farms in the Great Lakes States. Special crop farms are on the average small, and they employ seasonal laborers in correspondingly limited numbers. Fruit and vegetable picking groups are usually very heterogeneous, and their term of employment is short. A large proportion might be described as "holiday workers" who are employed in other industries (or are unemployed) during most of the year. Women and children not ordinarily considered a part of the labor market constitute an important portion of the total.¹

Organization of agricultural labor in the Great Lakes States has taken place on only two types of farms—those growing sugar beets and onions—neither of which is characteristic of the region as a whole. These two crops are grown under special conditions which create distinct relations between employer and employee. Onions for many years have been grown intensively on large-scale tracts owned or controlled by integrated companies which pack and ship the product to distant markets. Sugar-beet production, although carried on by smaller farms in northern Ohio and southern Michigan, has long been dominated by large sugar-refining companies which are the sole market for the crop. The production of both crops has depended upon seasonally employed resident laborers as well as a substantial minority of migratory workers from Southern States.

¹Ben Deming: Statement Concerning Certain Aspects of the Migratory Agricultural Labor Problem in Indiana. Hearings before the Tolan Committee, Part III, Chicago Hearings, August 19, 20, and 21, 1940 (pp. 977-980).

Unionism and strikes in these crops sprang from a long background of large-scale operations and a highly industrialized pattern of labor relations. The immediate stimuli to organized labor action during the thirties came from important urban areas near the principal sugar-beet and onion-growing regions. Trade-unionism in such cities as Toledo and Columbus (Ohio) and Detroit (Mich.) revived militantly during the period of the NRA in 1933 and 1934 and again during the expansion of the C.I.O. from 1936 through 1938.

Onion Workers of Hardin County, Ohio

The Onion Marshes

The famous onion workers' strike in Hardin County, Ohio, which took place during the summer of 1934, was one of the longest, most violent, and most highly publicized farm-labor outbreaks of the early thirties. It developed in a setting of large-scale intensive farming, which had been made highly profitable for many years by the availability of large supplies of low-paid seasonal workers. Continued wage cuts and deteriorating conditions of work during the depression years created a growing labor unrest which culminated in organized strike action.

The onion fields of Hardin County consisted of two large reclaimed tracts lying approximately 90 miles northwest of Columbus, Ohio, and 10 to 12 miles east of Lima—17,000 acres known as the Scioto Marsh and 4,000 acres known as the Hog Creek Marsh. Control of farming operations in both tracts was highly centralized. One owner in the Scioto Marsh cultivated 3,500 acres, and the three largest operators together owned and controlled more than 30 percent of the total acreage. One grower in the Hog Creek Marsh owned 1,200 acres or almost 30 percent of its total, while the remainder was cultivated by numerous small owners.²

The soil on these two tracts was a highly fertile black muck similar to the reclaimed vegetable-growing areas in Florida. For about 3 decades it had been devoted almost exclusively to the growing of onions for sale in outside markets. The town of McGuffey in the Scioto Marsh claimed to be the largest onion-shipping center in the world.

The acreage planted in onions was reduced steadily during the thirties, as a result of falling prices and decreasing productivity of the soil,³ and onion growing declined rapidly in profitability. Six thousand acres planted in this one crop during 1929 were valued at \$725,000, while the gross value of the output was more than \$1,000,000.⁴ Only 3,500 acres were planted in onions by 1934, and the growers claimed they were losing money.⁵

The labor history of the Ohio onion marshes resembled strikingly that of many intensive crop areas of California. There was an acute shortage

²Labor Conditions in the Onion Fields of Ohio (in *Monthly Labor Review*, February 1935, p. 324).

³Owing to the one-crop policy, land which formerly could be depended upon to produce 400 bushels of onions per acre would in 1934 produce only 250 bushels per acre. The Ohio State Agricultural Experiment Station, however, stated that with proper use of fertilizers more than 400 bushels of onions could be produced per acre; even as high as 500 had been produced at the station. (*Monthly Labor Review*, February 1935, p. 324.)

⁴*Monthly Labor Review*, February 1935 (p. 325).

⁵However, they refused access to their books to a committee on finance from the Ohio State House of Representatives. (*Monthly Labor Review*, February 1935, p. 325.)

of labor when onion cultivation began on a large scale. Growers overcame this by recruiting families and individual workers from Kentucky, West Virginia, and Tennessee by means of newspaper advertisements and personal solicitation.⁶ The peak seasonal labor demands for weeding and harvesting lasted roughly from June to September each year, though the work was by no means steady during those months. The laborers in pre-depression years migrated regularly to Hardin County for the summer work and then either drifted into other industries or returned to their home States in the late fall. Increasing numbers toward the end of the twenties began to stay in Hardin County the year round. With the onset of depression and unemployment in other industries, 400 to 500 families, or about 1,000 workers, almost completely depended for their livelihood upon employment in the onion crop, supplemented by relief.⁷

The workers' earnings were reduced drastically by unemployment and a growing labor surplus, at the same time that the acreage planted in onions was declining. The prevailing wage rate in the marshes was 12½ cents per hour in 1934 and many workers received as low as 10 cents per hour for jobs that lasted a few weeks each year. The U. S. Department of Labor and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in one survey of 456 families among Hardin County onion workers found that 177 made no more than \$250 a year, and that 8 out of 10 made less than \$500 a year. Almost half reported only 26 days of work per year, 6 out of 10 worked less than 51 days, and 7 out of 10 were employed less than 3 months.⁸

Some families also worked the land on a sharecropper basis, and their livelihood was little better than that of the straight wage earners; 75 percent made less than \$250 per year, and 98 percent less than \$500 per year. There were additional disadvantages in this system, too, since the landlord had more claim on the sharecropper's time.⁹

The living quarters furnished by the growers had been intended for occupation in the summer months only and were inadequate to house large families the year round. They were for the most part rough wooden shacks with tin roofs. Clothing and medical care available to the families were also inadequate. Because of poor living conditions and lack of proper food, as well as long hours of work on mucky soil, the tuberculosis death rate was three times that of other normal rural communities.¹⁰

Such labor conditions aggravated by general depression and unemployment made the onion workers increasingly aware of their exploitation. The personal family-farmer and hired-hand relationship did not exist when casual laborers were hired for short periods on an hourly wage by large growing enterprises. The two groups represented distinct classes whose

⁶Monthly Labor Review, February 1935 (p. 329).

⁷Of 468 onion workers investigated by the Department of Labor in 1934, only 47 reported having had work elsewhere during the year. (Labor Information Bulletin, U. S. Department of Labor, Washington, January 1935, p. 4.)

⁸Labor Information Bulletin, January 1935 (p. 4).

Some workers had additional income in kind such as a garden plot, a cow, or a house furnished them by landowners. A few families regularly canned fruit and vegetables for the winter months. Regardless of these means of supplementing their earnings, as many as three out of four were compelled to go on relief shortly after the onion harvest.

⁹The arrangement between the sharecropper and landlord was almost the same as that in vogue in the Southern Cotton Belt. The landlord prepared the land, sowed the seed, and made a charge to the sharecropper for this service. This "fitting cost" varied from \$3.50 to \$12.50 per acre. Even when the crop failed, the cost of planting was charged to the sharecropper. Often the landlord did not divulge the "fitting cost" until the end of the season. If he wanted to buy the crop, the sharecropper could not object. When the landlord did not take the crop, the cropper was compelled to sell his onions to the local distributors, who often paid less than the prevailing market prices. (Monthly Labor Review, February 1935, p. 328.)

¹⁰Labor Information Bulletin, January 1935 (p. 5).

interests differed sharply. The onion workers had some of the attributes of a distinct ethnic group, and their unity under stress rested in part upon a group consciousness similar to that of a disadvantaged racial minority. Like the "Okies" from the "Dust Bowl," they were native Americans of old stock recruited from Southern States, and their depressed economic and social status set them apart from the rest of the community.

ONION WORKERS' STRIKE

From 600 to 800 workers employed in the Scioto Marsh lands left their jobs in mid-June 1934, and picketed highways and side roads leading to the onion fields. Strike agitation began, according to one version, when a large landowner bought three new cars for his family and then turned down a request from his workers for higher wages. They had been receiving the standard 10 to 12½ cents per hour for a 10-hour day and demanded 35 cents per hour for an 8-hour day.¹¹

The strike was a spontaneous protest movement in the beginning but it soon received wide support from other organized groups. Organizations like the Socialist Party and the Civil Liberties Union obtained legal and financial aid for the strikers. Organizations of unemployed in nearby towns championed the walk-out. Additional encouragement came from trade-unions which were conducting a militant campaign in important industrial centers of Ohio. Toledo, for instance, had just experienced the dramatic and violent Auto-Lite strike, in which the National Guard had intervened. Several union organizers who had been active in that incident helped the onion workers to organize and formulate their demands. J. M. Rizor, a union leader who was prominent in the onion strike, was at the same time directing a strike of quarrymen in nearby Patterson, Ohio.¹² The field laborers on strike organized an independent Onion Workers Union within a few weeks and applied for an A.F. of L. charter in order to win full official support from affiliates of the federation.

The growers banded together to fight the union. They took an intransigent stand under the leadership of W. M. McGuffey, largest landowner and employer of the area. They refused to pay the wage scales demanded by strikers on the ground that to do so would force them into bankruptcy. Spokesmen of the employers announced in press interviews that they would suspend operations and let their fields grow up in weeds before they would recognize the Onion Workers Union or accede to its demands.¹³

Legal precautions were taken to prevent violent outbreaks and to curb the strikers' activities. An antipicketing injunction issued by a local court forbade, among other things, strikers "assembled or congregated in numbers in excess of two."¹⁴ The Toledo News Bee of June 25, 1934, reported that a "corps of picked special deputies, fresh from service as National Guardsmen at the Auto-Lite disorders in Toledo, await orders in Kenton, the county seat, to march on fields and guard strikebreakers."

¹¹Columbus Citizen, June 22, 1934.

¹²Toledo News Bee, June 25, 1934.

¹³Toledo Blade, June 21, 1934; Toledo News Bee, June 25, 1934

¹⁴Milwaukee Journal, August 5, 1934.

A Federal Conciliator from the U. S. Department of Labor arrived within a week after the strike had begun. Organized growers, after a conference with him, offered a compromise increase in wages to 15 cents per hour. This was refused by the strikers.¹⁵

Minor incidents of violence and disorder followed rapidly in succeeding weeks. Growers made strenuous efforts to recruit nonunion workers to replace the strikers, and the latter were just as persistent in opposing the importation of strikebreakers. Both contenders resorted to force. The *New York Times* of June 29, 1934, reported that two strikers were shot and wounded at McGuffey as they sought to halt teamsters going to work in the Scioto Marsh. The *Toledo Blade* of July 2 reported that telephone wires were cut, bridges blown up, nails put on the road, shots fired, and miscellaneous explosions set off in order to intimidate potential and actual strikebreakers. An explosion which damaged the home of Allen Edwards, manager of the Scioto Land Co., caused a particular sensation. Mrs. Godfrey Ott, wife of the mayor of McGuffey, was arrested about the same time on charges of intimidating strikers with a gun.¹⁵

Violence and disorder on both sides increased during the next several weeks. Local growers, businessmen, and nonunion labor formed vigilante groups to combat the strikers. Fifty special deputies armed with machine guns were employed to patrol the area. More than 60 arrests were made within 3 weeks as a result of clashes between deputies and pickets who were blockading roads leading to the onion-growing areas.¹⁶ Tear gas was used on several occasions to disperse crowds of pickets who were stopping automobiles. In one instance a deputy was discharged for firing shots indiscriminately while drunk.¹⁷ Two employees of the organized growers were arrested after peppering pickets with buckshot, and were placed under bond to the grand jury on the charge of shooting with intent to wound and kill.¹⁸

The tension and violence reached a climax on August 26, 1934. A short time previously, Mayor Ott's house had been bombed mysteriously. In the ensuing hysteria, according to newspaper accounts, vigilante groups virtually seized control of the town of McGuffey. Strikers and their families were reported to have barricaded themselves in their homes while hundreds of anti-unionists roamed the streets. A *New York Times* reporter who was at the scene of the bombing described the situation thus:

A mob of 300 to 400 men left off patrolling the streets and took to trucks. These men were nonunion men and their sympathizers. As they rode about they grabbed anyone who refused to ride and took them out of town. Twice I was warned to "get out of town," the second time by a deputy. The outburst today was the most violent since the harvesters went out in June.¹⁹

"Okey" Odell, strike leader and president of the newly chartered Onion Workers' Federal Labor Union No. 19724 (A.F. of L.), was arrested and held in the sheriff's barracks for questioning after the bombing. A mob of several hundred surrounded the building and seized Odell, while deputies made little effort to protect him. They paid little heed to the crowd, saying: "We thought the crowd was attracted to the

¹⁵*Dayton Journal*, July 1, 1934 (p. 1).

¹⁶*Hammond (Ind.) Times*, July 1, 1934.

¹⁷*Toledo Blade*, July 19, 1934.

¹⁸*Milwaukee Journal*, July 19, 1934.

¹⁹See *Anti-Unionists Seize McGuffey, Ohio* (in *New York Times*, August 26, 1934, p. 25).

jail by curiosity." The mob seized Odell and placed him in a truck. He said that at the time there were 15 deputies present, as well as a deputy prosecutor, and they made no effort to perform their duty and protect him. Odell also stated that a deputy came to the truck where he was and asked, "Is Odell in this truck?" Upon receiving an answer of "No," he turned away, although Odell claimed to have said, "The hell, I'm not."¹⁹ He reported that he was abducted and driven several miles to the county line, beaten severely by his abductors, threatened with lynching, and told to stay out of the county.²⁰

These events were sensationally described in the newspapers. McGuffey was portrayed by the Toledo News Bee in a front-page headline of its August 27, 1934, issue as "Onion Town Held Under Rule of Mob." Vigorous efforts were made by local citizens to prevent news reports and photographs from reaching outside newspapers. The United Press in a dispatch entitled "Violence in Onion Workers' Strike" reported one instance:

Clarence Bailey, photographer for the Toledo News Bee, was struck with a club wielded by a nonunion worker as he attempted to take a picture of Odell while the latter was being interviewed by a reporter. Another newspaper photographer from Lima, Ohio, was attacked by a crowd which seized and destroyed his camera and plates.irate citizens prevented cameramen from taking pictures of the mayor's wrecked home. (Gazette, Berkeley, Calif., August 26, 1934, p. 1.)

The Fort Wayne Journal Gazette of August 27, 1934, gave a sympathetic portrayal of the strikers:

* * * a little group of strikers, shotguns in hand, last night held at bay a huge mob bent on lynching their leader, Okey Odell. He lay ill in his home, his ribs fractured by a severe beating handed him by the angry strikebreakers who stormed his home tonight. His staunch friends stood on their front porch, their guns aimed at a growing mob in the street. * * * Parade of landowners and strikebreakers yelling "Let's lynch Odell."

Earlier a crowd of strikebreakers and sympathizers gathered in front of the town hall, where strikers and families were housed with Government relief funds. They threatened to run them out of town, but were halted by Town Marshal Willard Wies, vice president of the agricultural labor union which called the strike.

Two Kenton attorneys who received retainer fees from the A.F. of L. prepared and submitted affidavits against 57 alleged members of the band which abducted and beat Odell, charging them with attempted lynching, kidnaping, forming in a mob, and attempted assault and battery. The lynching charge grew out of Odell's claim that a rope was tied around his neck and that the other end was thrown over a limb.²¹ The suit, however, was unsuccessful.²² Odell in turn was charged a few weeks later with assault with intent to kill and pointing firearms, and eight other indictments were returned against strikers by the grand jury.²³ He was convicted on this charge, and more than a year later, in the fall of 1935, the conviction was upheld by the Ohio Supreme

¹⁹See Anti-Unionists Seize McGuffey, Ohio (in New York Times, August 26, 1934, p. 25).

²⁰Washington (D. C.) Herald, August 28, 1934.

²¹Toledo Blade, August 30, 1934.

²²At Washington, D. C., Federal Justice Department officials doubted whether the anti-kidnaping law could be invoked by Odell. Joseph B. Keenan, Assistant Attorney General, gave the opinion that "Federal activity is clearly limited to persons transported from one State to another and to cases in which the kidnapped is not heard from in five days." Another provision was that a person had to be threatened in the mails, which did not occur in Odell's case. Thus his assailants were not prosecuted in the courts, though Odell named 60 of them. The Grand Jury of Hardin County refused to issue indictments against them, and Sheriff Mitchell praised this body for "public spirited conduct." (New York Times, August 27, 1934, p. 3.)

²³Washington (D. C.) Star, September 14, 1934.

Court to which the case had been brought for appeal. He was sentenced to 90 days in jail, \$100 fine, and \$1,100 court costs.²⁴

The ability of the strikers to hold out for several months was ascribed in part to the sympathetic relief policy in effect. Allen D. Ochs, Relief Administrator of Hardin County, was criticized by growers for prolonging the strike by providing food and clothing for the onion workers.²⁵ Strikers could hold out indefinitely on these rations, as the Milwaukee Journal observed, since they lived almost as well on relief as they did on their low earnings as onion weeders.²⁶

The continued backing of the onion workers' union by other A.F. of L. organizations was also important, particularly that of the Central Labor Union of Toledo. The place of honor at the head of the annual Labor Day parade held in that city was given to the delegation of 30 onion-field workers of Hardin County, led by Okey Odell.²⁷ When force was being used against the strikers, T. S. Donnelly, secretary of the Ohio Federation of Labor, and Otto Brach, secretary of the Central Labor Union of Toledo, pressed the Governor of Ohio to call for a general investigation of law-enforcement conditions in the onion-growing district.²⁸

Other groups attracted by the wide publicity given the strike gave moral and material support to the onion workers. Among these were the National Committee of Agricultural Workers, the Civil Liberties Union, and the Socialist Party. During the height of the conflict Jerry Raymond, Socialist Party organizer, was reported beaten into unconsciousness and charged with "assault with intent to kill." He was found guilty and given a jail sentence of 90 days.²⁹

Attempted compromises were made as the strike approached its third month. The union reduced its demands for 35 cents per hour, time and a half for overtime, and double time for holidays. No definite official settlement of the strike was reached despite the intervention of a conciliator from the U. S. Department of Labor. Wages in the onion fields were increased generally from 15 to 20 cents per hour, and union spokesmen claimed that 11 operators had signed union contracts. The larger growers and their followers, composing by far the majority of all growers, consistently refused to recognize the union or pay the compromise wage scales it demanded.³⁰

DECLINE OF UNIONISM AMONG ONION WORKERS

The union announced that the strike would be continued again during the 1935 weeding season against any growers who refused to pay the union scale;³¹ it was not renewed, however. Onion acreage was reduced sharply in 1935. According to the growers, the per-acre yield of the land had declined to the point where many faced bankruptcy. They had undergone a number of catastrophes common in farming—drought, hail-

²⁴Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 5, December 1935 (p. 1).

²⁵Toledo Blade, July 19, 1934.

²⁶Milwaukee Journal, August 5, 1934.

²⁷Toledo Blade, September 1, 1934.

²⁸Toledo Times, September 18, 1934.

²⁹See *The Struggle for Civil Liberties on the Land* (American Civil Liberties Union, New York, 1935), p. 25.

³⁰Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 5, December 1935 (p. 1).

³¹Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 27, 1935.

storms, windstorms which carried away top soil, soil exhaustion after many years of specialized onion growing, low and uncertain markets, and the ever-present hazard of fire. The strike for higher wages was considered the last straw, forcing abandonment of onion cultivation.³²

A large part of the onion-growing industry during 1935 shifted to southern Michigan. The Scioto Marsh lands were planted in more diverse crops, in which mechanized cultivation and harvesting reduced the number of laborers needed. Displaced workers were maintained on relief or deported to their home States.

The ground was cut from under Agricultural Workers Union No. 29724 by a decrease in employment opportunities in the area. The union's position was made worse by periodic influxes of workers from Southern States. The secretary-treasurer reported gloomily in August 1936:

Onion growers around here are not farming as many onions this year. They will farm corn, potatoes, and some peppermint. They pay 15 cents an hour, and very few people get steady employment, just part time. They are not hiring union help in the onion fields. In fact, they are hardly hiring any natives at all. They bring in labor from other States, mostly from Kentucky. (Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 12, July 1936, p. 5.)

Unionizing activity consequently was transferred to other areas, particularly to the expanding sugar-beet districts of southern Michigan and northern Ohio.

Sugar-Beet Workers of Ohio and Michigan

Great Lakes Sugar-Beet Industry

The sugar-beet industry in the Great Lakes States has certain unique characteristics which distinguish it from other types of agriculture in the region. Sugar beets, because of their bulkiness and perishability, cannot in contrast to most crops be sold by the producers in scattered competitive markets. Each grower is limited to one local market, the nearest sugar-refining factory. This means that sugar refineries frequently dominate the grower, particularly if one company owns the majority of plants. The Great Lakes Sugar Co. alone, during the mid-thirties, owned or controlled 19 out of about 2 dozen factories in Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana, and for a long time it set the standards for the industry in these States.

The price to be paid for beets was set by collective-bargaining agreements or contracts between the company and representatives of the beet growers' associations before the planting season began. Wage rates and general employment conditions for labor hired for planting and cultivating also were determined in such agreements. The labor contracts were then submitted to individual workers. Refining companies tended to control labor relations on the beet fields. They set the wage rates, supervised farm work through field agents, and recruited laborers for the growers.

A large proportion of the hired labor in the Great Lakes region was composed of resident seasonal workers. This was made possible by a

³²Milwaukee Journal, August 5, 1934.

comparatively long growing and harvesting season, large acreage allotments per worker, and opportunities for alternative employment in off-season months.³³

Beet growers in the Great Lakes region at first depended upon a shifting labor supply composed of German-Russians and central Europeans, numbers of whom each year drifted into other nearby industries. Michigan growers' agents during the thirties began to recruit labor from among Mexicans in south Texas. According to the Texas State Employment Service, five "emigrant labor agencies" were operating in behalf of Michigan and Ohio beet growers as compared to one for those of Colorado.³⁴ From official sources it was estimated that through organized recruiting by various interest groups some 8,000 workers were sent out annually from Texas, more than 5,000 of these usually to Michigan.³⁵ Growers for several years had transported labor by train, but this declined when workers acquired their own cars. Moreover, truck transportation became widely used when drivers discovered a profit in hauling beet workers to the fields, remaining there to haul beets, then hauling workers back to Texas at the end of the season.³⁶ Sometimes the 1,600-mile trip from Texas to Michigan was made in one 48-hour stretch without a stop, with men, women, and children standing for the entire distance.³⁶

Importation of Mexicans was opposed in some quarters. The State Welfare Department, among other agencies, complained that they were a burden on the taxpaying public. In 1932, for instance, it had cost the State of Michigan some \$70,000 to return destitute Mexican laborers to their homes in the Southwest. The department suggested that resident white workers of Michigan could replace Mexicans if "living" minimum wages were established and child labor abolished. Growers, on the other hand, argued that white resident labor was unsuitable; it couldn't "stand the gaff," they said, and tended to "walk out" before a crop was completed.³⁷

Competition for jobs during the depression years of the early thirties was aggravated among growing numbers of local unemployed and imported transient laborers from Texas. Relief authorities discontinued grants at the beginning of the season to clients able to perform beet jobs of thinning and cutting. The State Relief Commission of Michigan announced, in July 1935, that work-relief projects would be closed, so

³³From various surveys during the thirties, it appeared that, while wage rates per acre were lower in southern Michigan and northern Ohio than in northeastern and southern Colorado, annual incomes were on the average higher because of larger acreage allotments. Workers in southern Michigan in 1935, for instance, averaged 12.6 acres as compared to 5.3 acres thinned per full-time worker in southern Colorado and 6.7 acres in northern Colorado. Total working days of 80 to 100 for the season were reported frequently for Michigan, whereas the average for all areas, according to the U. S. Department of Labor, was found to be only 56 days. Moreover, as the Great Lakes region is highly industrialized, more jobs outside of the beet fields were available for field workers. The average supplementary income per beet-worker family in southern Michigan during 1935 was \$93 as compared to \$44 in northern Colorado (See Elizabeth S. Johnson: *Wages, Employment Conditions and Welfare of Sugar Beet Laborers*, in *Monthly Labor Review*, February 1938, pp. 331, 337.)

³⁴Brief Submitted by Texas State Employment Service to the Tolan Committee to Analyze the Texas Emigrant Agency Law and other pertinent legislation (Austin, Tex., 1940, p. 54); also Statement by M. C. Henderson, Beet Growers' Employment Committee Inc., Saginaw, Mich., in Hearings before the Tolan Committee, Part III, Chicago Hearings, August 19, 20, and 21, 1940 (pp. 1271-1275).

³⁵In 1939 some 4,700 were examined and sent to Michigan, while only 239 were sent to Colorado. This represented a decrease of 500 for the former. Though there was a 25-percent increase in acreage of beets under cultivation, 500 fewer workers were required, because of the adoption of more mechanized methods of cultivation and harvesting. (Brief Submitted by the Texas State Employment Service, p. 50.)

³⁶Brief Submitted by the Texas State Employment Service (pp. 72 and 51).

³⁷Lansing Journal, May 9, 1935 (p. 1).

that farmers would not be "handicapped by a labor shortage caused by reluctance of relief workers to quit their jobs for work on farms."³⁸ Natives were thus forced indirectly to work in the beet fields at the same wages as the Mexicans.

Wages in sugar-beet fields declined accordingly. During a period of temporary general recovery they not only failed to rise, but continued to fall, from \$23 per acre in 1930 to \$16 in 1934. Growers offered \$14.40 at the beginning of the 1935 season, when the first large strike among beet workers occurred in the Great Lakes region.

UNIONISM AND STRIKES, 1934-37

The pattern of labor relations in the sugar-beet industry of the Great Lakes region produced unrest, which culminated in unionism and strike action in the early thirties. Though beet laborers were hired individually or in small groups by growers who themselves were usually small-scale operators, the stability characterizing the family-farmer hired-man relationship was lacking. Beet laborers were poorly paid and employed for only a few months each year. Most of them had to depend upon other casual jobs or on relief during the rest of the year. Social distance between employers and employees was further widened where the latter were recruited from among nonwhite workers of other States, particularly Mexicans from south Texas. The dominance which large sugar-refining companies exerted over farm operations, finally, destroyed any sentiments of personal loyalty and identity of class interests which beet laborers might feel towards their employers. Collective bargaining between organized grower-employers and sugar companies in setting prices for sugar beets and wages for beet labor stimulated the workers to organize in self-protection.

The depression in the early thirties brought matters to a climax by imposing further hardships upon beet workers. Their wage rates continued to decline during a period of recovery in other industries. Urban trade-unionism under the stimulus of the NRA at the same time was reviving militantly in important industrial cities close to the beet-growing areas of Ohio and Michigan.

Favorable Government legislation applying to the sugar-beet industry provided a special incentive to labor organization. The Jones-Costigan Act of 1934 made substantial benefit payments to growers, under production-adjustment contracts, contingent upon their eliminating child labor and fixing minimum wages. The labor clauses were made effective during 1935, before the act was invalidated by the Supreme Court, and they strengthened the bargaining position of beet workers and indirectly encouraged them to organize.

Laborers in the sugar-beet fields of the Great Lakes region were particularly susceptible to unionism because of their proximity to important industrial areas. Beet workers transferred to other industries more often than did most seasonal agricultural labor. Many former beet hands of various nationalities had drifted into better-paid employments in nearby cities like Toledo or Detroit, and their places were taken often by imported Mexicans. Cyclical unemployment in the steel, automobile, and other heavy industries of the area drove many unskilled workers

³⁸Detroit Free Press, July 24, 1935.

back to the beet fields in the early thirties. Many of them had had some experience with labor organizations in cities, and they now joined with representatives from the aggressive A.F. of L. local union of Hardin County onion workers which had developed from the strike in 1934. These two groups carried on a joint unionizing campaign among beet-field workers in Hancock County, Ohio, and Lenawee County, Mich., during 1934 and 1935.

Agricultural Workers (federal labor) Union No. 19994 of Blissfield, Mich., and No. 20027 of Findlay, Ohio, were organized and chartered early in 1935. Some 400 laborers had been enrolled in the former factory district by March.³⁹ By August the organizers claimed to have signed up about 700, or roughly 98 percent of the resident beet workers in the Blissfield area and an equal number in the Findlay district.⁴⁰

Union organizers conferred with representatives of the local beet growers' association in Blissfield, and submitted demands for substantial wage increases, union recognition, and a written agreement entailing closed-field conditions. When these demands were refused the union called a strike of some 500 workers during May, before beet thinning had got fully under way.

Any real unity among the workers was questionable, since they were a very heterogeneous racial group. According to one observer there were five distinct nationalities: German-Russians, Japanese, Czechs, Rumanians, and Mexicans. The German-Russians were permanent residents of the area who formed a compact ethnic group and did not take part in the strike. Rumanians and Czechs recruited from among unemployed industrial workers of nearby cities were the most active. Mexicans were mostly nonresident or migratory. Though they participated in the strike they were not well organized, and only a fraction of the total to be employed had as yet arrived in Michigan.⁴¹

The controversy was resolved within 2 weeks, after a conciliator from the U. S. Department of Labor persuaded the contending parties to resume negotiations. The union won a written agreement that applied to 1,400 growers and 700 resident beet workers. The beet laborers won an increase in wage rates to a standard \$19 per acre, or \$4.60 per acre above the growers' original offer. The agreement also included union recognition and a closed-field clause which stated that only union members could work in the fields. Growers were required to obtain the union's permission before hiring extra labor. The union members in return were required to perform all work under the terms of the contract, regardless of the condition of the fields.⁴²

This agreement served as a model for other local beet workers' unions in the area. Local No. 20027 of Findlay faced greater difficulty in winning equivalent demands. Its negotiations began later in the season, after the beet work had already started, so that strike action was not so effective. Representatives of the union and of about 990 organized beet growers in the Findlay factory district met on June 17, 1935. Union spokesmen submitted their proposal for a written "Blissfield agreement," including union recognition and a flat \$19 per acre. Growers' representatives rejected these demands, asserting that the prevailing contract for a

³⁹Toledo Times, March 29, 1935.

⁴⁰Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 1, August 1935 (p. 1).

⁴¹See Sidney Sufirin, Labor Organization in Agricultural America, in American Journal of Sociology, January 1938 (p. 557).

⁴²Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 3, October 1935; No. 4, November 1935; and No. 6, December 1936; see also Appendix R (p. 455).

rate of \$10 per acre for cultivating and 80 cents per ton for harvesting was "fair and square."⁴³

A special conference, held by 450 Findlay beet workers, was attended by J. M. Rizer, A.F. of L. organizer who had been active in the 1934 onion strike; by Okey Odell, onion-strike leader and president of Agricultural Workers Union No. 29724 of McGuffey, Ohio; and by Robert T. Fox, Conciliator from the U. S. Department of Labor.⁴⁴ When attempted mediation by Fox failed, 97 percent of the members in a secret poll voted in favor of a strike. Next day most of them "failed to report for work." Martin Studenka, president of Findlay Local No. 20027, termed it a "vacation" pending negotiations.⁴⁵

The only untoward incident was the arrest of three field workers on charges of "trespassing," filed by one grower.⁴⁶ A settlement of the strike was reached next day, when a conference of union and grower representatives meeting with the Federal Conciliator formulated a compromise agreement. The choice between two contracts—the one already submitted by the growers, and the Blissfield model submitted by the union—was left optional for individual growers and field workers. Workers were required to abide by the terms of wage contracts already signed with individual employers until or unless the latter voluntarily agreed to change contracts. Gains to the beet workers were of doubtful value under this arrangement, though labor-employer relations were evidently amicable. Union organizer J. M. Rizer stated: "I feel that I have never talked with a more reasonable group of men." (Findlay Republican Courier, June 26, 1935.)

The beet workers' unions of Michigan and Ohio endeavored to extend their control during the following years. The most active Agricultural Workers Union, Local No. 19994 of Blissfield, affiliated itself with the Central Labor Union of Toledo in order to obtain closer cooperation from organized urban labor. The Great Lakes Sugar Co. was accused of trying to sign up growers independently of the Blissfield Beet Growers Association, with whom the Agricultural Workers Union had already signed a contract. It was suspected that the company was attempting to break both organizations.⁴⁶

The National Committee of Agricultural Workers sponsored and financially backed an organizing campaign throughout the 19 factory districts of the Great Lakes Sugar Co. in Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana. The A.F. of L. chartered new locals in the districts of Fremont, Ohio, and St. Louis, Mich., and new unchartered locals were organized in Ottawa, Ohio, and Alma, Mich.⁴⁷ Union organizers attempted to enforce the flat rate of \$19 per acre won in the 1935 Blissfield contract. The Great Lakes Sugar Co., on the other hand, was endeavoring to change to a rate of \$15 per acre, with a bonus of 80 cents per ton for harvesting over 5 tons per acre.⁴⁸ The union's efforts failed, and wage rates fell

⁴³Findlay Republican Courier, June 19, 1935 (p. 3); June 22, 1935 (p. 2).

F. L. Richard, president of the Beet Growers Association, claimed that the proposed 1935 contract would yield the workers \$19 per acre—\$10 per acre for blocking and hoeing, and 80 cents per ton for harvesting, at an average of 8 to 12 tons per acre, depending upon the weather. Union spokesmen, on the other hand, argued that it left them "holding the bag" in case of bad weather and poor crops. (Toledo News Bee, June 8, 1935.)

⁴⁴Findlay Republican Courier, June 24, 1935 (p. 5).

⁴⁵Idem, June 25, 1935 (p. 5).

⁴⁶Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 10, May 1936 (p. 2).

⁴⁷Idem, Vol. I, No. 11, June 1936 (p. 1).

⁴⁸Idem, Vol. I, No. 10, May 1936 (p. 2).

generally from the previous year's level of \$19 to an average of \$17.20 per acre in southern Michigan.⁴⁹ The beet workers' position was weakened during 1936 by the U. S. Supreme Court's invalidation of the Jones-Costigan Act. Provisions for minimum wages and restrictions upon the employment of child labor were removed for the growers. Mexicans in the meantime were being imported in growing numbers. The union's efforts to establish stable collective bargaining consequently were neutralized.

The beet workers' organizations failed to maintain their position during 1937. The Blissfield union extended its jurisdiction over factory districts in Lenawee and Monroe Counties in Michigan, and Fulton and Lucas Counties in Ohio. It carried on negotiations during May with the Great Lakes Sugar Co. and the growers' associations of Findlay and Blissfield, but failed to win any collective agreement. Union demands stipulated an increase in wage rates to \$21.50 per acre, whereas the company and the growers offered \$18. The latter wage finally prevailed, as the union was too weak to carry out a strike.⁵⁰

Agricultural Workers Union No. 19994 did not participate in the first convention in Denver of the C.I.O.'s United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America. The local remained with the A. F. of L. and experienced a temporary renaissance when the federation renewed its organizing drive in agricultural industries in order to forestall the C.I.O.

Labor Trouble in 1938

The beet workers' union in April 1938 resumed negotiations on wages and working conditions for the coming season. It conferred on several occasions with representatives of the Great Lakes Sugar Co., the Paulding Sugar Co., and the Sugar Beet Growers' Association of Lenawee County, Mich. The AAA under the terms of the new Sugar Control Act had set a minimum wage rate of \$18 per acre and \$1 per ton for harvesting above a minimum of 7 tons per acre. The union sought a \$23 minimum together with the \$1 per ton above the standard 7 tons, but was willing to accept the \$18 minimum if the workers received 50 percent of the cash benefits paid growers under the act.⁵¹

A strike threatened when grower-employers and workers could not agree and negotiations broke down. On numerous farms where beet planting had already begun the laborers failed to report for work. The union meanwhile attempted to organize Mexicans and other out-of-State migrants brought in to the beet fields.⁵²

Labor trouble and unrest were prevalent for several weeks. Fearing a labor shortage as a result of generally unsettled conditions, growers threatened to plant only 6,000 acres of beets instead of the usual 12,000 acres which the Great Lakes Sugar Co. required in order to operate its plant.⁵³ A shut-down threatened to cut off Blissfield's principal source of income, amounting to approximately \$600,000 for beet growers,

⁴⁹Elizabeth S. Johnson: *Wages, Employment Conditions and Welfare of Sugar Beet Laborers*, in *Monthly Labor Review*, February 1938 (p. 334).

⁵⁰*Rural Worker*, Vol. II, No. 6, July 1937 (p. 1); Elizabeth S. Johnson, *op. cit.* (p. 334).

⁵¹*Toledo Blade*, April 15, 1938.

⁵²*Detroit Free Press*, May 20, 1938.

\$150,000 to beet-field workers, and another \$150,000 for company employees. The beet industry, furthermore, provided one-fifth of the village taxes.⁵⁴

The spectacular and dramatic reactions of various factions in the community were perhaps characteristic of strike situations in a one-industry town. When the Magnesium Fabricators, Inc., a few weeks previously had threatened to remove its factory from the nearby town of Adrian because of labor difficulties, an anti-union organization of some 400 businessmen and farmers was formed and named the Lenawee Protective League. Sheriff Fred Seager swore in 400 league members as special deputies to maintain order when the strike of beet-field workers threatened.⁵⁵

The anti-union organization was a vigilante movement similar to the Associated Farmers in California. The Akron Times-Press described "secret, oath-bound vigilantes sworn to drive out 'radical labor' factions." American Legion members occupied key posts, and the sheriff acted as "Supreme Commander." A "regiment" of 16 "motorized companies" of at least 25 men each was formed at a mass meeting in Blissfield, in which Mayor Ernst assured farmers that there would be sufficient labor. Vladimar Posvar, newspaper reporter, quoted a spokesman of the vigilantes as saying: "The whole idea is to avoid trouble with a showing of strength." (Akron Times-Press, May 19, 1938.)

The Toledo Central Labor Union opposed the Blissfield anti-union movement, passed a resolution condemning the American Legion for participating in vigilantism, and demanded that Lenawee County publish the names of its special deputies.⁵⁴ Francis J. Dillon, general organizer for the A.F. of L. at Toledo, sent a protest to the U. S. Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins, against the growers' policy of importing Mexican beet workers from south Texas to break the Agricultural Workers Union of Blissfield. He claimed that there was collusion between sugar refineries and beet growers.⁵⁶

A conciliator was sent to Blissfield by the U. S. Department of Labor when Dillon requested Federal intervention to prevent violence by the vigilantes. A settlement was reached on May 25, 1938, after conferences among growers, workers, and union officials. The union members had voted to strike for a wage scale of \$25 per acre for a season's work, where the yield averaged 12 tons or less per acre. After heated controversy they accepted the compromise agreement establishing a wage scale of \$18 per acre plus \$1 per ton over the minimum of 10 tons per acre.⁵⁷ Numerous critics charged that this was a "sell-out" on the part of the union officials. They pointed out that the workers gained nothing by the agreement, since beets almost never ran over 10 tons to the acre. That the vigilantes' show of strength had played no small part in determining the outcome, to the disadvantage of the beet workers, was implied indirectly by A.F. of L. organizer Dillon. He said:

This meeting will be remembered for years * * * not for what we have achieved, but for what we have averted * * * no class hatred * * * and no poor devil will be killed. (Toledo News Bee, May 26, 1938.)

⁵⁴Toledo Blade, May 20, 1938.

⁵⁵Detroit Free Press, May 20, 1938.

⁵⁶Journal of Commerce, New York, May 25, 1938.

⁵⁷Toledo Blade, May 26, 1938.

Labor discord threatened again during the fall harvest season. The members who remained in the Agricultural Workers Union after the debacle in May withdrew from the A.F. of L. and joined the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America of the C.I.O. The new union asked for recognition as sole bargaining agent for the Great Lakes Sugar Co. employees, establishment of grievance machinery, and a conference of employer and labor representatives to draw up contracts for 1939. Representatives of the Beet Growers Association, the sugar company, and the C.I.O. field workers' union could not agree. The growers doubted the union's strength or ability to force its members to live up to contracts, while the general manager of the Great Lakes Sugar Co. claimed that he had no authority to make agreements with the union since his company did not hire the labor directly.⁵⁸

An emergency meeting was called in the fall of 1938 for the United Beet Workers Council of the C.I.O., representing labor organized in three factory districts controlled by the Great Lakes Sugar Co. The C.I.O. union could not mobilize sufficient strength to carry on effective collective bargaining, because of the earlier failures in beet workers' organizations in the area and the continued importation of many Mexicans. Financial stringency finally forced the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. to restrict its activities largely to urban processing industries rather than field crops. Sugar-beet workers' unions in the Great Lakes region consequently were abandoned.

Strikes in Miscellaneous Crops

Intensively grown onions and sugar beets were the only field crops in the Great Lakes region in which unionization was seriously attempted. Labor trouble in other fields throughout the Middle West was sporadic and scattered. Small spontaneous strikes similar to those described previously for Pennsylvania, New York, and New England were numerous during the mid-thirties.

The first of these was an unsuccessful 1-day strike of 50 vegetable farm workers near Milwaukee, Wis., during July 1933.⁵⁹ The Sturgeon Bay cherry-growing area in Wisconsin was the scene of more extensive labor unrest for a short period in July 1935.

Growers thought that disturbances among the heterogeneous casual workers recruited for cherry picking (a large number of whom were minors) were to be expected at the beginning of the season. One spokesman said: "Our job is to weed out in the first couple of days those who don't want to work."⁶⁰ The trouble in 1935 was instigated by a nucleus of young workers brought in from other areas, who claimed they were misled regarding the wages to be paid for cherry picking. They succeeded temporarily in persuading about 200 pickers on several of the largest orchards to strike for higher rates. Growers claimed that the strike leaders were "scaring" others from going to work by destroying cherries and kicking over pails of fruit picked by those who refused to join the strike. The leading "agitator" attempted to lead a march of strikers to the local relief office. He was arrested by the sheriff and sentenced to 6 months' imprisonment, with the alternative of leaving the county for

⁵⁸Detroit Free Press, August 21, 1938.

⁵⁹Josiah C. Folsom: *Labor Disputes in Agriculture, 1927-38.*

⁶⁰Milwaukee Journal, July 21, 1935.

good. When he chose the latter, the strike ended.⁶⁰ Several years later the Wisconsin Industrial Commission investigated complaints that minors recruited in Milwaukee to pick cherries in Door County sometimes earned less than \$1 per week net. The commission announced that hereafter it would set minimum standards of wages and living conditions for cherry camps.⁶¹

A strike of approximately 100 corn huskers in the vicinity of Charleston, Ill., late in August 1935, was publicized by newspapers throughout the country. The Associated Press on August 21, 1935, reported the incident as follows:

FARMER VIGILANTES SPOIL STRIKER PLOT

Embattled broomcorn farmers, carrying shotguns and pitchforks, patrolled their fields today after turning back strikers who sought to entice away their harvest hands.

A vigilante organization numbering about 300 landowners rallied quickly at the Joe Driscoll farm this morning when informed that 100 strikers had ordered 40 workers out of the field.

Yesterday at the same place some 100 workers had fled when strike sympathizers, armed with rifles, curtly bade them to quit working.

Landowners insist the strikers' demands for pay increases were not justified, although this year's harvest scale is lower than last year's. "The crop is standing straight, where last year it was beaten down by wind and rain," one farmer explained. "A man can make \$3 to \$4 a day with the same effort he put in last year despite the lower hourly wage scale."

Strikers want a 15-cent increase from the prevailing rate of 30 cents per hour.

Other strikes were less sensational. A spontaneous walk-out of child laborers on a truck farm near Minneapolis, Minn., during August 1935, was reported to have won a wage increase of from 7½ to 10 cents per bushel for picking potatoes.⁶² Another spontaneous strike in September won an increase in rates from 10 cents per basket to 15 cents for pickers on a 200-acre bean farm near Lisbon, Ohio.⁶² Some 35 workers on a truck farm in the vicinity of Bono, Ohio, went on strike in the summer of 1936 and succeeded in raising wages from 15 to 25 cents per hour for common labor, and from 20 to 35 cents per hour for truck and tractor work. The strike began when 6 truck and tractor workers who were receiving 20 cents per hour walked out and were joined by 26 common laborers. All of them lined up on Highway No. 2 to picket.⁶² A sit-down strike of 25 asparagus cutters on a large truck farm near East Lewiston, Ohio, in May 1937, resulted in a compromise gain of 1½ cents per pound over the prevailing 2-cent rate.⁶²

Unionism in Processing Industries

Farm-labor strikes were of minor importance as compared to the organizing activity among workers in urban processing industries related to agriculture. Perhaps the earliest of such groups to be organized were florists, gardeners, and greenhouse workers. During April 1927, some 270 locally organized greenhouse workers in Cook County, Ill., won compromise gains in a strike for wage increases. Again, late in February 1928, 110 organized florists and gardeners struck in an unsuccessful

⁶⁰Milwaukee Journal, July 21, 1935.

⁶¹Idem, June 7, 1939.

⁶²Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 2, September 1935 (p. 1); No. 3, October 1935 (p. 1); and No. 12, July 1936 (p. 1); and Youngstown Vindicator, May 24, 1937.

attempt to win a closed shop. About 100 organized florists and gardeners in Logan County carried out a 2-month strike from April to June 1930 for union recognition and other demands.⁶³

Union organizations became relatively inactive in these industries until late 1933. During December of that year an undetermined number of organized greenhouse workers in Cook County struck for improved wages and working conditions. A more important organization developed in Ashtabula, Ohio. There the A.F. of L. Greenhouse Workers Federal Labor Union No. 18655 was chartered and took part in numerous strikes. A walk-out of 125 workers, demanding wage increases and union recognition, lasted for 2 weeks in mid-October 1933 and was finally settled with compromise gains. Again in March 1934 and April 1935, short 1- and 2-day strikes were called in protest against unsatisfactory working conditions.⁶³

The union's position was weakened by the declining profitability of the greenhouse industry at that time. In August 1935, Erwin Hansel, union secretary, reported:

We are in a bad situation here. The employers are laying off men and cutting wages to \$2 a day for common labor and \$2.70 for skilled. By cutting in one plant at a time they are trying to split the workers.

Our union had an agreement with the employers which has expired. They are refusing to sign another. The union is attempting to arbitrate but we may be forced to take stronger action.

The police and deputy sheriffs run men into work when there are strikes. Recently the sheriff was seen carrying a machine gun to scare the strikers. (*Rural Worker*, Vol. I, No. 1, August 1935, p. 1.)

On a smaller scale, 25 regularly employed year-round workers and 100 seasonal laborers on the 800-acre tract of the Ferry Morse Seed Co. near Rochester, Mich., organized the Seed Workers Federal Labor Union No. 20466. The management's efforts to discourage unions among the employees and its refusal to bargain with union representatives led to a National Labor Relations Board investigation.⁶⁴

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A., after its formation at the Denver convention in July 1937, rapidly progressed in organizing industries allied to agriculture in the Great Lakes region. The union made some efforts to maintain beet workers' organizations in Michigan and Ohio but these were soon abandoned. It centered its attention almost completely on unionizing important food industries (some of which were rather distantly related to field agriculture) in the larger cities. The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. had the signal advantage of enjoying the support of large and firmly entrenched C.I.O. unions in such industries as steel, automobiles, farm machinery, and glass, in the major cities and industrial centers of the Great Lakes region.

U.C.A.P.A.W.A. District No. V, by the end of 1938, reported having signed union contracts, some of which contained closed-shop provisions and vacations with pay, with such firms as the College Inn Food Products Co. of Chicago, the Harbauer Co., the Woolson Spice Co., Archer Daniels Midland Co., and Slayton's Greenhouse of Toledo, and the Serviced Products Corp. of Clearing, Ill. Grain workers' locals of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. won agreements with milling companies in Thief River Falls and Minneapolis, Minn. Organizing campaigns meanwhile were being carried out in such important concerns as Campbell's, and

⁶³Josiah C. Folsom, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴*Rural Worker*, Vol. II, No. 6, June 1937 (p. 4).

Libby, McNeill & Libby in Chicago, and the Corn Products Refining Co. plant in Argo, Ill.⁶⁵

By January 1940, U.C.A.P.A.W.A. District No. V was represented by 16 local unions, and at the end of the year by almost two dozen. Impressive achievements in wages, hours, closed-shop, and other hiring provisions were made in a variety of industries throughout several cities during 1939 and 1940. Union contracts were obtained, in some cases through strike action, by such affiliates as the following: United Cannery Workers Union Local No. 32, composed of 500 employees in the Frazier Packing Corp. plants in Elwood and Alexandria, Ind.; United Food Packers Local No. 44 in the Rival Packing Co. of Chicago, manufacturer of dog food; U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Local No. 79, with contracts covering workers in three dairies, one bakery, one milling company, and one cannery, all in Bay City, Mich.; Local No. 68, with contracts covering employees of Dailey's Pickle & Canning Co. in Saginaw, Mich.; and Local No. 30, of several hundred cannery workers organized in the Gerber Canning Co. of Fremont, Mich., said to be the world's largest manufacturer of canned food for babies. Local No. 58 in Detroit won contracts with the Gehlert Coffee Co. and the Brown Greenhouse Co. It obtained a provision for union labels on all goods produced and marketed by the La Choy Food Products Co., largest packer of oriental foods in the United States, and on "Aunt Jane" food products, processed by the J. J. Glielow Co. Local No. 233, United Candy Workers, in Milwaukee, Wis., won a union contract with the George Ziegler Candy Co.; and Local No. 191, Memorial Park Workers Union, won union-shop contracts covering 275 employees of the 13 largest cemeteries in the city. The most important victory for the district came in late 1940, when Local No. 194, organized among workers in the Chicago plant of the Campbell's Soup Co., won jurisdiction over the employees by a vote of 1,139 to 439 in a NLRB election.⁶⁶

U.C.A.P.A.W.A. District No. V during 1940 endeavored to organize the important dairy industry of Wisconsin, particularly the numerous condensaries in the State. It achieved a few minor successes, mainly in affiliations from former A.F. of L. locals. Dairy and Allied Workers Local No. 341 was represented in a few dairy and cheese plants of Fond du Lac; United Milk Condensary Workers Local No. 236 won an agreement covering 32 employees of the Libby, McNeill & Libby plant in Whitewater, Wis., and Local No. 24, United Milk Condensary Workers won wage increases and seniority privileges for 24 employees of the Armour & Co. plant in Bloomer, Wis.⁶⁷

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. could make little headway against the strongly entrenched Teamsters Union of the A.F. of L. This union, in the strategic position of controlling truck transportation and the distribution of milk, was able to extend its organization into numerous processing plants throughout the State to the exclusion of competing labor organizations.

⁶⁵U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Yearbook, 1938 (pp. 10, 11, 22).

⁶⁶U.C.A.P.A.W.A. News, Vol. I: No. 3, September 1939 (pp. 12, 13); No. 6, February 1940 (p. 3); No. 7, April 1940 (p. 7); No. 8, May-June 1940 (pp. 4, 13); No. 9, July-August 1940 (p. 11); and No. 10, September-October 1940 (pp. 4 and 5).

⁶⁷Idem, Vol. I, No. 6, February 1940 (p. 15).

Farmer-Labor Conflict in Wisconsin and Minnesota

In Wisconsin and Minnesota the most important labor developments in industries allied to agriculture involved the A.F. of L. rather than the C.I.O. A complicated problem arose because of the triangular relationship among farmers, processing industries, and urban labor unions.

Wisconsin and Minnesota have long been the traditional home of farmer-labor cooperation, based in large part upon a relative equality in status among farm operators. In contrast to the Pacific Coast and the Southern Cotton Belt, for instance, agricultural policy in Wisconsin and Minnesota has not been dominated by a minority of large-scale companies controlling an important part of total farm output or acreage under cultivation. Correspondingly there has been no large pauperized class of tenants and farm laborers.⁶⁸

Both Wisconsin and Minnesota are primarily agricultural. In contrast to the Wheat and Corn Belt States farther west, they are characterized by important metropolitan industrial areas in which vigorous labor movements have developed—Milwaukee in the former and St. Paul and Minneapolis in the latter. Cooperation between farmers and city laborers developed to the highest degree on a basis of mutual interests; diversified family farms raised food products, particularly milk, for nearby large urban populations whose principal consumers were laborers. Both groups united politically to attack trusts, particularly in industries of immediate importance to the farmer, such as flour milling, meat packing, milk processing and condensing, and manufacture of farm machinery.

The agricultural-labor problem, arising from the employment of large numbers of propertyless nonresident seasonal wage workers, has been virtually nonexistent in a diversified region where the family farm and its supplementary farm hand have prevailed. Instead, agrarian conflict during the thirties followed the pattern established earlier in the Southwest. Farm owners and tenants organized together to safeguard their proprietary interests and improve their bargaining position as sellers of produce in city markets. On numerous occasions in Minnesota and Wisconsin as well as in the Wheat and Corn Belts, they collectively resisted legal evictions for tax delinquency or mortgage foreclosure. The most highly publicized farmers' strikes were organized among dairymen in the Chicago and Milwaukee milksheds by the Farm Holiday Association, offshoot of the Farmers Educational and Cooperative Union. In these the small farmer was backed by urban labor organizations, including affiliates of the Communist Party. The Communist-controlled United Farmers' League, however, failed to gain a strong foothold among small farm operators.⁶⁹

Wisconsin and Minnesota remained relatively undisturbed by the wave of farm-labor strikes in the early thirties. Labor unions made little effort to organize agriculture or allied industries in these States, except

⁶⁸Sixty-nine percent of Wisconsin's farms are worked by full owners, 10 percent by part owners, less than 1 percent by managers, and 21 percent by tenants (as compared to a national average tenancy rate of 42.1 percent). Of farms reported by assessors, 3 percent have one person per farm, 12 percent have two persons, 18 percent three persons, and nearly 20 percent four persons, totaling more than half of Wisconsin's farms. Only 9 percent of the farms enumerated were 210 acres or more in size. (Bulletin No. 220, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Madison, Wis., January 1941, pp. 3-4.)

⁶⁹See Report by Clarence Hathaway in *The Communist* (New York), July 1935 (p. 653).

for a few processing plants. The C.I.O. from its beginning in 1935 consistently tried to win the support of the small farmers, and it was favorably received by their pro-labor organizations in the Middle West. At one convention in 1937 James Patton, representing the National Farmers Union, and John Bosch, representing the National Farm Holiday Association, both expressed approval of the C.I.O. and called for farmer-labor unity:

Farmers have no interest in low wages for their chief customer—the city worker. To the extent that the C.I.O. raises wages, it raises the buying power for farm products. (Quoted from *Oklahoma Union Farmer*, Oklahoma City, September 1, 1937, p. 3.)

Fraternal delegates of the Farmers Union and Farm Holiday Association attended the first convention of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in Denver during July 1937 and expressed general approval of its aims. U.C.A.P.A.W.A. spokesmen made it plain that “no attempt to organize family-sized farms will be made, but the union will limit itself solely to the agricultural corporations, and to farms on which 10 or more workers are employed.” Donald Henderson, president of U.C.A.P.A.W.A., stated that it would send no organizers into the Middle West or New England and would attempt no unionizing of corn or wheat farmers.⁷⁰

Henderson and E. L. Oliver of Labor’s Nonpartisan League met with the national board of the Farmers Union in St. Paul, Minn., in December 1937, and signed a “pact of cooperation” to obtain legislation of mutual benefit and to carry on educational work furthering farmer-labor cooperation.⁷¹

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A.’s organizing campaign in the food-processing industries throughout the Middle West was successful in the Great Lakes urban industrial areas but achieved little in Wisconsin and Minnesota. The A.F. of L. won the major gains and aroused the most farmer-labor conflict.

The Brotherhood of Teamsters attempted to organize processing plants in Wisconsin’s dairy industry, which produced more than half of the State’s gross farm income.⁷² Dairy farmers for some time had been expressing irritation over the relatively high earnings of milk-wagon drivers, the first occupational group to be organized by the Brotherhood of Teamsters in the dairy industry. Greater friction developed in 1937 when the teamsters organized the employees of dairies, creameries, and condensaries. Contracts including such provisions as a minimum wage of \$22.50 per week, maximum hours, overtime rates, and closed shop were signed with the largest milk-processing companies—Borden’s, Carnation, Pet, and National Dairy. This campaign carried the union into small towns and rural communities in all parts of the State, where these companies had numerous plants.⁷³

The Teamsters Union and the A.F. of L. soon came into conflict with small farmers who, through their cooperatives, controlled about two-thirds of Wisconsin’s 526 creameries and 800 of its 1,880 cheese factories.⁷⁴ The union tried to avoid organizing these but was almost forced to do so. Employees of the cooperatives in several communities demanded the same wages and working conditions that union members

⁷⁰*Oklahoma Union Farmer*, September 1, 1937 (p. 1).

⁷¹U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Yearbook, 1938 (p. 23).

⁷²Bulletin, No. 220, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture (p. 3).

⁷³The Carnation Co., for instance, had some two dozen processing plants in scattered small towns throughout Wisconsin.

⁷⁴Bulletin No. 220, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture (p. 21).

earned in plants owned by large corporations. The union found itself in a particularly uncomfortable position in Milwaukee. It put a cooperative milk company, the Golden Guernsey, on the "unfair list" and favored the patronage of competing private or corporate organizations which had signed union contracts.

The situation almost led to open violence in Richland Center. The Teamsters Union organized the employees of a cooperatively owned creamery and submitted the standard demands of a minimum wage of \$85 per month and other provisions. When the management refused to negotiate, an appeal was sent to the NLRB to hold an election and determine union jurisdiction. After a mass meeting, 500 farmer patrons under the supervision of County Sheriff Ben McLaren ousted all union members from the plant while negotiations were pending and organized a picket line to prevent their return. The discharged union members were later reemployed after pressure from the NLRB. Negotiations were resumed until a settlement was reached.⁷⁵

The Teamsters' unionizing campaign was criticized by farm groups and particularly by large newspapers. The Madison Journal, for instance, drew no distinction between private and cooperatively owned enterprises. It attacked the union and stressed the division of interest between farmers and organized labor. An editorial entitled "Burden on Farmers" in an issue of June 7, 1938, stated the viewpoint that—

Every penny paid in increased wages to the employees of the butter and cheese factories must come out of the farmers selling their milk to those factories. * * * The wage question at creameries and cheese factories is a direct issue between the employees and the milk-producing farmers. (Madison Journal, June 7, 1938.)

The dairy controversy was at its height when farmer-labor conflict in another industry strained relations still further. A strike of 90 employees of a spinach cannery in Racine County occurred during May and June 1938.

Increasing unrest among the relatively low-paid cannery workers was partly due to the fact that the spinach-growing area lay between Kenosha and Racine, both of which were well-unionized industrial towns. Late in 1937 the International Hod Carriers and Common Laborers Union organized these workers into a new A.F. of L. Canning Factory (Federal Labor) Union No. 1045. The strike was called in 1938 in protest against a wage cut at the beginning of the canning season, and the cannery remained closed for more than a month despite the efforts of a conciliator from the U. S. Department of Labor.⁷⁶

Anti-union sentiment was intensified in this situation. The Frank Pure Food Co. (operating the cannery) under contractual agreement supplied farmers with seed and was the sole purchaser of the spinach grown and harvested. Farmers suffered considerable loss when their one market was closed by the strike. Several hundred farmers held protest meetings and formed a "protective association" which would be independent of the farmer-labor coalition. They petitioned the Governor to intervene and settle the strike.⁷⁷

Union spokesmen claimed the strike was more in the nature of a lock-out deliberately provoked by the company as a convenient way out

⁷⁵Milwaukee Sentinel, September 29, 1938.

⁷⁶Idem, June 1, 1938.

⁷⁷Idem, May 27, 1938; Kenosha News, May 27, 1938.

of its present difficulties. It was unable to sell its canned spinach at a profitable price, and it was bound by contract to take the crop of the farmers at a stated price provided there was no stoppage through labor trouble at the plant. By precipitating a strike through wage reductions, it was able to escape these obligations without loss. Newspapers emphasized particularly the losses which the strike caused the farmers. During a period in which an acrimonious political campaign was being waged in the State, the publicity served to discredit labor unionism and weaken the combined farm-labor backing of the La Follette administration.

The strikers attempted to counteract the growing opposition to farmers without capitulating to the management. They offered to can the spinach free of charge for 2 weeks and turn all proceeds over to the farmers to compensate them for their losses. The text of the offer as reported in the Milwaukee Sentinel of June 8, 1938, was as follows:

The union hereby agrees that it will work for a period of 2 weeks to can the spinach free of charge. The profits from the sale of the spinach canned during these 2 weeks are to go entirely and directly to the farmers. The union executive board is authorized to assist in setting up the proper committee of farmers, workers and management to carry out the agreement.

(Signed) A.F. of L. Canning Factory Laborers Union No. 1045.

This arrangement offered some difficulties, however, and the offer was not put into effect.

These conflicts were seized upon by groups interested in opposing Governors La Follette of Wisconsin and Benson of Minnesota and the Farm-Labor Progressive Party organizations which supported them. Representatives of the Associated Farmers of California took this opportunity to attempt to extend their organization to this section of the Middle West. Col. Walter Garrison, president of the California association, addressed groups of farmers in the chief "trouble centers"—Racine County and Richland Center, Wis., and St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minn. (where farmers were becoming increasingly hostile to the powerful Teamsters Union ruled by the Dunne brothers).

Few tangible results were achieved. Thomas Quinn, president of the Minnesota Liberty League, and W. F. Schilling, former member of the Federal Farm Board under the Hoover Administration, had gone to California previously to study the structure and tactics of the Associated Farmers.⁷⁸ They organized a temporary Associated Farmers of Minnesota having approximately 100 members in a few counties. The new organization failed to survive and could not gain even a weak foothold in Wisconsin.

The Associated Farmers' efforts were not completely without effect, however. It acted in conjunction with other conservative groups having the support of the more important newspapers during the gubernatorial and senatorial elections of 1938, and helped to drive a wedge between the farmer and labor groups which together had been the mainstay of the Progressive Party. Governors La Follette of Wisconsin and Benson of Minnesota consequently both lost office.

The important Wisconsin Council of Agriculture next attacked the unions. The importance of this body lay in the fact that it was composed of officers of all farm cooperatives and farmer organizations in the State,

⁷⁸Minnesota Leader, St. Paul (official organ of Farmer Labor Association of Minnesota), June 4, 1938 (p. 1); see Appendix S (p. 456).

which had a total membership of roughly 80,000 farm owners or operators. The council passed a resolution asserting the right of farmers to "produce free from unlawful interference" and attacking union practices and existing Federal and State labor relations laws.⁷⁹

The following year the Republican administration of Governor Heil adopted an antilabor bill sponsored by the Council of Agriculture, which took effect as State law in 1939. Under its terms the La Follette "Little Wagner Act" was repealed and the State Labor Board was abolished. Various restrictions were placed on labor-union activities, including a provision that strikes affecting perishable farm products would be allowed only after 10 days' notice.⁸⁰

Several organizations withdrew from the Wisconsin Council of Agriculture in protest against the measure which it had sponsored; among these were the Farmers Equity Union, the Milk Pool of Madison, and the Midland Cooperative Wholesale (Minneapolis and Milwaukee). Critics complained that the rank and file membership was never consulted about the measure which, it was claimed, represented the views of city employers rather than farm operators. It was approved, critics pointed out, only by the directors of the council, who were officers not elected democratically by the membership.⁷⁹

⁷⁹Christian Science Monitor, August 22, 1938.

⁸⁰Idem. The provisions put into effect were: (1) Repeal of the La Follette Little Wagner Act, and abolition of the State board. (2) Definition of labor disputes as only those existing between employer and the majority of employees in a plant unit. (3) Ban on closed shops unless voted by 75 percent of the employees affected. (4) Abolition of the "check-off" without written consent of the employer. (5) Prohibition on secondary picketing. (6) Strikes affecting perishable farm products to be allowed only after 10 days' notice. (Milwaukee Post, May 5, 1939.)

CHAPTER XXII.—The I.W.W. in the Wheat Belt

Seasonal Workers in Wheat Harvesting

The rural Middle West, including both the diversified farming and dairying region bordering the Great Lakes and the Wheat Belt region of the Great Plains, has long been viewed as one of the most typically "American" sections of the United States. There the rural economy has been most egalitarian in its social and occupational structure, and the institution of family farming most secure. For these reasons one would expect it to have had few agricultural labor disturbances of the type which developed in other specialized crop regions, particularly those where large numbers of casual and migratory workers were seasonally employed on large farms. A large and distinct labor class of such workers nevertheless did evolve in the wheat fields of the Middle West, and it brought unionism and conflict in its wake.

Farms specializing in wheat in certain areas were among the first in the United States to adopt methods of large-scale production. In contrast to the customary pattern of settlement in the Middle West, many large tracts during the 1870's were purchased by eastern investors from railway companies which had received land grants from the Government as a subsidy for transportation. "Capital," wrote William Allen White in 1897, "has been bold enough to venture out of its beaten path to these favored regions."¹ Mechanization of farm operations was favored by evenness and fertility of the soil and regularity in climate, along the valley of the Red River of the North flowing through North Dakota, in eastern Washington and Oregon, and other limited areas. The weather during any given month was about the same year after year. The "bonanza farm" which developed in the Wheat Belt during the latter part of the nineteenth century was similar in many ways to a factory. As described by William Allen White, it was characteristically an absentee-owned enterprise of several thousand acres, run by a general manager who supervised its marketing relationships and directed the work of "division superintendents." The latter, in turn supervised the actual farming operations of planting, cultivating, and harvesting, which were performed by gangs of hired wage workers using a good deal of machinery.

The pattern of labor relationships which derived from this system of large-scale agriculture was distinctly at variance with the middle western family-farm and hired-man tradition. The very size alone of the "bonanza farm" destroyed the stable personal relationship of farm labor to the land and its proprietor. The owner no longer worked at the side of his hired men, to stimulate them by personal example. The functions of management, supervision, and manual labor became separate and mutually exclusive. Hired men, now employed in the sizable numbers required for farms of several thousand acres, no longer ate at the same table as their employers. Instead they were boarded and lodged together in dormitories or bunkhouses.

¹William Allen White, *The Great Business of a Wheat Farm*, in *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. XXII, No. 5, November 1897 (p. 533).

Mechanization of farm operations in the production of one crop made farm labor highly seasonal. A skeleton staff was kept on the farm the year round for continuous work of maintenance and repair. During the peak seasons of plowing and seeding in the spring and harvesting and threshing in the fall, extra labor forces of four or five times the number of "regulars" were employed for 4- to 6-week periods.² Gangs of hired workers performed jobs which supplemented horse-drawn and motor-powered implements, such as plows, harrows, drill sowers, reapers, binders, and threshers. The laborer on a "bonanza farm," like the mill hand in such industries as lumber and textiles, was primarily a machine tender employed at standardized repetitive tasks.

Seasonality of jobs disrupted the stability and continuity of the farmer-laborer relationship, which hitherto had provided the basis for the hired man's security and social status. The bonds were severed almost completely where grower-employers became dependent upon transient or migratory laborers from other areas to perform short-period work. Regular patterns of seasonal labor migration developed as specialization in wheat farming became general over a wide region including many States west of the Mississippi. By the late 1870's large numbers of itinerant workers were following a succession of ripening harvests, beginning with the early June harvest in Oklahoma and Kansas, and working northward to the fall season in the Red River country in North Dakota. A few continued on into the late fall harvests in the Canadian prairies.³

By the early 1900's the Wheat Belt was estimated to require as many as 250,000 men for short seasonal farm operations each year. They traveled extensively, mainly by freight train, in a complex series of local as well as regional migrations through such States as Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Minnesota, and the Dakotas.⁴

The rift between the resident farm employer and the migratory farm laborer was widened by differences in background. Large proportions of the temporary workers were recruited from nonagricultural seasonal employment, particularly mining, lumbering, railroad maintenance, and unskilled construction work. Many lived during the most of the year in the larger cities of the Middle West—St. Louis, Omaha, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, and Chicago. They enjoyed neither the small-farm background nor the occupational environment of a type likely to develop the stability and sentiments of personal loyalty which characterized the family-farmer hired-man relationship. Standards of personnel relations, job security, and opportunity for advancement were no better for the workers on mechanized wheat farms than for the employees of urban factories. Those who earned their major livelihood in nonagricultural industries had little in common with resident farm populations of the communities in which they worked for short periods each year. The latter in turn were imbued with the traditional hostility and suspicion which stable rural folk tend to feel toward casual strangers, particularly those coming from big cities. Neither group recognized the other as neighbors or members of the same class having common interests and problems.

²White, *op. cit.* (pp. 541-542).

³*Idem* (p. 543).

⁴Paul S. Taylor: *Migratory Farm Labor in the United States*. U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Serial No. R.530 (p. 2).

Beginnings of Organization

Unionism and organized labor-employer conflict were long incipient on mechanized wheat farms of the Middle West, where class divisions comparable to those in other industries emerged. The hired worker in the new farming situation was no longer an individual who enjoyed social equality with his employer and who saw eye to eye with him. Between large farm operators and casual laborers, the "cash nexus" in the form of a daily or weekly wage became the sole tie; and, as a principal element of cost to the former and a major source of livelihood for the latter, the wage rate was an issue stimulating division rather than identity of interest between the two.

Contrary to the usual trend of farm-labor outbreaks, however, strikes were first carried out against smaller or more "marginal" farm employers rather than the large "bonanza" enterprises. The main issues in the beginning were food and conditions of work rather than wage rates. Mechanized farms operating on a large and integrated scale for a time enjoyed advantages over their smaller competitors. Because of their lower production costs and more strategic contacts with the wheat markets, they could afford larger outlays for boarding and lodging their employees. They were at least partially compensated by having a greater choice of the available labor supply and by avoiding costly labor trouble. Less-favored growers suffered by comparison and faced greater unrest from their seasonal workers. According to William Allen White's analysis in 1897—

On small farms, further south than the Red River country, it is no unusual thing to find farmers "skimping" the table at harvesting and threshing time. And many a landlord has found a strike on his hands in the midst of the harvest because of the quantity or the quality of the food he served. But the bonanza farms—at least the better class of them—are as careful of the food set before the men as they are of the fodder that is put before their horses, and this is as far as agricultural generosity can go.⁵

Unrecorded numbers of sporadic strikes of disaffected harvest laborers occurred over a period of several decades. No continuous labor movement developed, however, until after the "bonanza" farm had declined as a characteristic type of agricultural enterprise in the Middle West. Specifically, labor unionism in the Wheat Belt did not become established until the Industrial Workers of the World launched its organizing campaign during the First World War.

The I.W.W. in Agriculture

The I.W.W.'s program for revolutionary unionism appealed primarily to unskilled and disadvantaged laborers in industries left unorganized by the somewhat exclusive craft unions of the American Federation of Labor. In contrast to the latter's general policy of conciliation and class collaboration at the time, the I.W.W. advocated continuous "direct

⁵White, *op. cit.* (pp. 544, 545). The absence of white refined sugar on the table, according to this author "is a point that has caused many a strike in the Mississippi Valley."

action"⁶ as a prerequisite to the material improvement and ultimate emancipation of labor.

Its activities among agricultural workers in the beginning developed incidentally to its broader program for unskilled workers in extractive, manufacturing, and transportation industries in general. I.W.W. "missionaries" were active for many years among casual laborers, traveling by highway and freight car, living in "jungles" and "skid-rows," working in fields, factories, lumber camps, and mines. The "wobblies" attained considerable prestige in leading street agitation and "free speech fights" among single migratory laborers or "bindle stiffs" employed in various seasonal industries of the Pacific Coast. I.W.W. leadership in the famous strike of hop pickers in Wheatland, Calif., in 1913 brought the union Nation-wide attention. More important strike successes were won among unskilled mass-production workers in the industrial Northeast and Middle West during the immediate prewar years. When depression and unemployment at the outbreak of the war drove large numbers of industrial workers to seek casual farm jobs in the Wheat Belt, union organizers shifted their attention to this region. Paul S. Taylor described this "invasion" thus:

In the second decade of the twentieth century American radicalism in the form of the I.W.W. spread rapidly among these men. It became unsafe to ride the freights unless one carried a "red card." Farmers learned the meaning of strikes for better wages and living conditions, and responded with vigilante mobs, driving agitators and workers from towns at the point of guns. Class warfare broke out in the most "American" sections of rural America. (Migratory Farm Labor in the United States, pp. 2-3.)

The I.W.W. did not win its large following among harvest hands in the Middle West primarily by its announced program for world revolution. Its influence as a union was based, rather, on its emphasis upon collective action as a means of combating exploitation of labor. The appeal of the doctrine of class struggle was understandable in a farming area in which employers and workers differed sharply in cultural background, social status, and economic interest. The willingness of farm operators to enlist aid from the forces of the law, and in some cases to use extralegal violence to protect their position, made the class divisions even more apparent.

For several years the I.W.W.'s efforts in agriculture were confined to organizing a few local unions scattered throughout the Wheat Belt and the Pacific Coast. Then during the years of World War I it worked to expand and "streamline" the farm-labor movement. The national convention of the I.W.W. in September 1914 passed a resolution sponsoring a conference for representatives of local agricultural workers' unions. At this meeting, held in Kansas City, Mo., on April 16, 1915, a new agricultural section of the I.W.W. was chartered as the Agricultural Workers Organization and satirically numbered "The 400."⁷ The A.W.O. was planned to be at first a temporary means for "organizing

⁶The concept of "direct action" was elastic, broad enough to include all tactics or methods for placing obstacles before the employers' conduct of industrial operations. Such tactics included militant and unannounced strikes when the firm's position was most vulnerable; violence and even destruction of employers' property; demonstrations and organized opposition to legal suppression; and restriction of output through "slow-down strikes" or "the conscientious withdrawal of efficiency." All were designed to "educate" the worker through bitter experience to the realities of the "class struggle," and in this way to unify the proletariat for the ultimate revolutionary general strike.

⁷This union was later reorganized and rechartered as the Agricultural Workers Industrial Union No. 110, whose members were known as "the one-ten cats."

on the job" and improving farm-labor conditions in the coming wheat-harvest season. Later it was to be disbanded so that its members could transfer to the older industrial unions. Such was its success from the beginning, however, that it continued to function as a distinct branch of the I.W.W. for several years.⁸

The A.W.O.'s effectiveness was due chiefly to its adoption of policies which were practical and well suited to an industry like wheat raising, composed of thousands of farms hiring migratory seasonal laborers over a wide region. The union was decentralized in structure, relying more than formerly on many voluntary organizers who migrated continually to work at seasonal farm jobs. The A.W.O. secretary was empowered to grant a commission of 50 cents to these organizers for every new member whom they recruited for the union. By this means it became possible to issue credentials to every member willing to act as an official delegate. This was a radical departure from the accepted practice hitherto followed by the I.W.W. Tactics of collective bargaining and strike action were made more flexible in order to avoid open conflict of a type that would impel other elements of the community to support the employer. At the Kansas City conference in 1915 the delegates decided that street agitation or "soap boxing" in harvest towns was to be avoided, as it would dissipate the union's energies in "free speech fights" and conflicts with a hostile public opinion. Such slogans as "Get on the Job!" and "Never Mind the Empty Street Corners: the Means of Life Are Not Made There!" became the keynote.

Further refinements in techniques were worked out at a later organization meeting in Kansas City during July 30-31, 1915, held to outline a program for the coming grain harvest in the early fall months. The I.W.W. intended to standardize its demands for a uniform increase of 50 cents per day, to a daily wage of \$3.50 over a wide area. This was dropped, however, as the delegates felt that the union did not as yet have sufficient strength to "make it stick." They agreed instead that higher pay was to be demanded whenever it could be insisted upon and won. Members were instructed never to hold out to the bitter end. In case of a strike, those directly involved were to bring other members of the union onto the struck job in order to strike again or to slow up production until the employer was willing to comply with union requests. This policy in fact became one almost consistently followed by the I.W.W. and characteristically associated with it.

These changes in strategy were dictated in part by a new development. The United States Government established the Federal Employment Office in 1915 to recruit workers in anticipation of a labor shortage during wartime. The office in Kansas City, Mo., primarily supplied workers for the wheat harvests in Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, and adjacent territory. I.W.W. spokesmen maintained that the office purposely recruited an oversupply of labor in various grain-growing sections by advertising in large metropolitan dailies in the East. It was further charged with refusing to send members of the I.W.W. to any job.

This forced the "wobblies" to keep their union affiliations secret. Whenever an employer knew or suspected that certain workers were members of the I.W.W. and fired them for that reason, they were advised to go to any lengths, even to tear up their union card in front of

⁸Except as otherwise noted, remainder of this section is based upon data in E. Workman: History of the "400". One Big Union. Chicago, 1935 (pp. 5-19).

the "boss," in order to hold their jobs. They were then to notify the A.W.O. office which would give them duplicate cards.

By the practice of such methods the A.W.O. became entrenched in the Wheat Belt⁹ and, in a period of relative labor shortage and rising wages, it secured wage increases and better working conditions. During the 1915 harvest the A.W.O. was successful in many areas in enforcing a minimum of \$3 per day and in some cases of \$3.50 per day. The membership expanded rapidly; by the end of October 1915, the union had approximately 2,000 regular members and had improved working conditions on a scale far beyond the limits of its organization. Its campaign was extended to other industries after the harvest season was over in late fall. A.W.O. organizers were sent into lumber regions such as Bemidji and International Falls, Minn., Ashland, Wis., and St. Maries, Idaho. They played no small part in miners' strikes, as in the Mesaba Range during June 1918. By the end of 1916, the union had enrolled nearly 20,000 workers,¹⁰ and its momentum was such that it was reported to have carried the total I.W.W. membership from 5,000 in the spring of 1916 to over 70,000 at its peak in 1917. In the public mind, as Workman points out, A.W.O. ("The 400") became *the* I.W.W. of the Middle West, having branch offices in several cities.

Soon, however, "The 400" began to disintegrate. Its complex and unwieldy structure created internal dissension and pressure for reorganization. The A.W.O. leaders, in trying to hold members during the off-season months by organizing them in other industries, were criticized by other I.W.W. affiliates, which had expected to recruit members seasonally from the A.W.O. under the provision for free transfer among unions within the I.W.W.

The I.W.W. convention in November 1916 went on record as favoring the establishment of organizations, similar in character to the A.W.O., in other basic industries. The general executive council, on the basis of this decision, issued charters for the new unions and appointed officials for them. The A.W.O. lost thousands of members to these newly formed bodies. In March 1917, as an industrial union now restricted solely to the field of agriculture, it was chartered as Agricultural Workers Industrial Union No. 110.

Suppression of the I.W.W.

A more important and immediate reason for the decline of the I.W.W.'s agricultural-labor unionism was the vigorous suppression of its activities by local, State, and ultimately Federal law-enforcement authorities. From the beginning of its organizing campaign the union had faced forceful opposition from the farmers and businessmen in local communities throughout the Wheat Belt. The New York World's portrayal of the A.W.O. membership in 1916 was perhaps typical of the popular conception:

Thousands of these migratory mendicants have thronged the Middle West this year, creating a reign of terror throughout the rural communities and intimidating all who do not join their organization. (Quoted in Brissenden, *The IWW: A Study of American Syndicalism*, pp. 335-336.)

⁹Included in its membership, according to one former official, were such seasonal workers as miners, harvest hands, lumber jacks, railroad maintenance workers or "gandy-dancers," construction workers, and even some cotton pickers in southern Louisiana. (Workman, p. 14.)

¹⁰Paul Brissenden: *The I.W.W.: A Study of American Syndicalism* (Columbia University Studies in History and Economics, New York, 1919, Vol. 83, p. 338).

Organizers in many towns received rough treatment at the hands of local vigilantes like those found more often in the Far West. In Mitchell, S. Dak., during the fall of 1916, for instance, I.W.W. members were forcibly run out of town and excluded from the area. In anticipation of labor trouble during the fall harvest season of 1916, newspapers in Madison advised "every member of the vigilante committee over 21 to * * * supply himself with a reliable firearm and have it where he can secure it at a moment's notice."¹¹

The Agricultural Workers Industrial Union No. 110 suffered its full share in the Nation-wide campaign to suppress the I.W.W. after America entered World War I. Opposition to the organization was fanned to the point of hysteria by stories which portrayed diabolical union plans for widespread sabotage and destruction of property.

Renewed violence against the I.W.W. early in 1917 began in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain States, where the union was conducting numerous strikes in mines and lumber camps. A widespread fear that sabotage and strikes would spread to agriculture led to further legal and extralegal suppression. Special councils of defense were created in Washington, the Dakotas, and other States to prevent destruction of wheat and fruit crops. Certain industries deemed "vital to national defense"—including the harvesting of agricultural crops, production of spruce lumber, and extraction of certain minerals—were put under a strike ban by the Federal Government. The Department of Justice was said to be "prepared to deal swiftly with strikers" in such industries.¹² Federal troops on July 12, 1917, arrested 60 I.W.W. organizers in Ellensburg, Wash., on the charge of "interfering with crop harvesting and logging in violation of Federal statutes."¹³ The union called a strike for agricultural, construction, and lumber workers in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana in protest against these "illegal arrests," but it failed to materialize.¹⁴ The announcement only stimulated further violence and mass arrests.

Comparable suppression was extended to the Middle West to prevent organized labor conflicts in Western States from spreading to the Wheat Belt. During a miners' strike in Bisbee, Ariz., wide publicity was given a report that the agricultural workers' division of the I.W.W. would carry out sympathy strikes and sabotage in wheat fields throughout the Nation. Roger Culver, an I.W.W. organizer addressing a meeting of striking miners in Miami, Ariz., was reported to have said that "if necessary to enforce the miners' demands, there will be no wheat crop on the North American Continent."¹⁵ One newspaper report credited the I.W.W. with having 55,000 members at that time among the farm laborers of the Middle West, on whom the striking miners of Bisbee and other Mountain areas could rely for sympathetic support.¹⁵

Great trepidation was felt throughout South Dakota when Army officers on July 7, 1917, announced that the I.W.W. had begun a State-wide movement to destroy the State's ripening crops. These officials declared that detailed maps of the principal growing districts were in the hands of I.W.W. leaders, and that men were stationed at strategic

¹¹Morning Republican (Mitchell, S. Dak.), August 5, 1916 (p. 3).

¹²Idem, August 17, 1917.

¹³Idem, July 12, 1917.

¹⁴Idem, August 18 and 21, 1917.

¹⁵Idem, July 13, 1917.

vantage points throughout the State to set fire to fields when given the signal.¹⁶ Reports of crop sabotage and incendiarism followed from many quarters.¹⁷

Farmers and authorities vigorously combated what they felt was a threat to destroy their very livelihood. A wave of arrests and vigilante violence similar to that in Western States was carried out. Headlines in the *Morning Republican* (Mitchell, S. Dak.) of July 10, 1917, announced that "Shotguns Will Greet Any Attempts of 'I Won't Workers' to Destroy Ripened Grain Crops," and the "would-be labor saboteurs" were warned further that "any of them who attempt to carry out the threat of wholesale crop destruction will be roughly handled and will be lucky if they escape with their lives."

Federal officials, meanwhile, kept close watch on trains arriving in the wheat-growing regions. "Suspicious characters" were placed under arrest on various pretexts.¹⁸ Fifteen I.W.W. members were arrested in Mitchell on charges of riding a train without tickets, in violation of a law passed early in 1917 by the State legislature.¹⁸ In Duluth, Minn., and other cities, large numbers of "wobblies" were arrested for "vagrancy."¹⁸ In many towns like Aberdeen, S. Dak., I.W.W. headquarters were raided, furniture, and other property destroyed, and literature seized.¹⁸

The effectiveness of the I.W.W. in the grain fields during the 1917 season was greatly limited by such opposition. It attempted several times to organize widespread strikes, but these were unsuccessful. The organization during August distributed large numbers of circulars in towns throughout North Dakota and Minnesota, declaring that a strike was on in the harvest fields of South Dakota and appealing to casual workers to avoid that State. The strike was in part a protest against the alleged "reign of terror" and "vigilante tactics" used against the I.W.W. in such towns as Aberdeen, S. Dak. There, it was charged, local businessmen and the mayor himself participated in mob violence.¹⁹ The union demanded its right to organize without molestation and to deal directly with farmers and farm organizations, rather than through commercial clubs like the Chamber of Commerce.²⁰

Strikes by the "wobblies" were nullified by the availability of alternative labor supplies. Not only did Federal and local authorities suppress the I.W.W. by arrest and criminal prosecution of its leaders; they also recruited new and less-militant types of labor from rural districts to replace "hobos," "stiffs," and "gandy-dancers" from the cities, who, they felt, were more continuously exposed and more susceptible to I.W.W. propaganda. Boys between 16 and 21, too young for military service, were enlisted throughout the country during 1917 to offset the anticipated shortage of labor in the harvest fields.²¹ Organized recruiting by local chambers of commerce throughout the Wheat Belt, working in cooperation with the Employment Service established by the U. S. Department of Labor, was highly successful. Despite the threatened strike in August

¹⁶*Morning Republican* (Mitchell S. Dak.), July 7, 1917.

¹⁷A farmer near Ellis, S. Dak., was reported to have discovered a fire set in his fields, but the grain was too green to burn. (*Morning Republican*, Mitchell, S. Dak., Aug. 7, 1917.) A farmer near Lyons, Kans., reported that an attempt was made to burn his wheat field by throwing an "incendiary bomb" from a passing freight train. Another farmer in the same vicinity previously reported that his grain field had been burned in this manner. (*Idem*, July 7, 1917.)

¹⁸*Morning Republican* (Mitchell, S. Dak.), issues of July 8, 10 (p. 2), 19, and 31 (p. 6), 1917.

¹⁹*Idem*, August 5, 1917.

²⁰*Idem*, July 12, 1917.

²¹*Idem*, issues of July 8 (p. 10) and August 10 (p. 1), 1917.

1917, officials of Mitchell (a trouble center the previous year) were able to announce that they had "encountered no trouble whatever with the I.W.W.," and that the "harvest labor handled easily."²¹

Union effectiveness was further limited by closer Government regulation over wages and working conditions. Though wages increased in the late war years of 1917 and 1918, this was a result of labor shortage rather than union pressure. County agricultural agents during 1917 organized farmers into "county councils for defense" to cooperate in handling harvest workers. In many counties throughout South Dakota wages were set by these organizations at \$3 per day, and strong pressure was exerted to avoid deviation from this standard.²² State councils of defense in the Wheat Belt in 1918 set legal maxima on wage rates to be paid by farmers, with severe penalties exacted for violations.²³ Such regulations, together with the "Work or Fight" orders sent to men in the fields (providing for drafting into the Army of those who refused for one reason or another to work) still further reduced the possibility of effective strikes by the I.W.W.²⁴

The Agricultural Workers Industrial Union was disorganized, finally, when the Federal Government outlawed the entire I.W.W. In the fall of 1917, agents of the U. S. Department of Justice raided the central I.W.W. headquarters in Chicago and arrested more than 100 members of the organization for violation of the Federal Espionage Act. They were sentenced in August 1918 to long terms on a number of charges: 15 received sentences of 20 years, 35 for 10 years, 33 for 5 years, and 12 for 1 year and a day; the rest were given nominal sentences. Judge Landis also fined the defendants a total of \$2,300,000. Elsewhere in the country other I.W.W. members received comparable punishment.

Postwar Decline

The union failed to revive during the postwar period. Legal suppression was continued against the I.W.W., particularly during its renewed drive in 1919-20 in the harvest fields of the Middle West. Organizers were arrested and given heavy penalties under the terms of various State syndicalism laws passed under the wartime emergency.²⁵ Demobilization and temporary unemployment of large numbers provided a surplus of agricultural workers which further weakened the union organization.²⁶

Some resurgence of I.W.W. activity came in the early 1920's. After a convention of the Agricultural Workers Industrial Union No. 110 in September 1920, members began another organizing drive in the wheat fields of the Middle West.²⁷ Prof. D. D. Lescohier described "wage wars"

²¹Morning Republican (Mitchell, S. Dak.), issues of July 8 (p. 10) and August 10 (p. 1), 1917.

²²Idem, July 27, 1917 (p. 2).

²³In South Dakota, for instance a maximum \$4.50 per 10-hour day was applied for seasonal day labor. Punishment not to exceed \$1,000 and imprisonment for 1 year was stipulated for farmers who violated the law. (Morning Republican, July 26, 1918, p. 1.)

²⁴Morning Republican, July 29, 1918.

²⁵For instance, Harry Breen, I.W.W. organizer, was sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment when arrested at Wakeeney (Trego County), Kans., while carrying his union credentials. (Industrial Worker, Everett, Wash., Oct. 28, 1922, p. 2.) Numerous arrests and indictments of "wobblies" active in the oil fields of Oklahoma and Kansas also took place during the year. In Wichita, Kans., 20 were reported held for 19 months without trials because of their organizing activities. (Idem, June 8, 1919, p. 1.)

²⁶During the 1919 harvest in South Dakota, for instance, it was estimated that 50 percent of the harvest hands were former soldiers. Large numbers migrated into the State from Minnesota, Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, and Wisconsin, as well as nearby Kansas and North Dakota, and an "abundance of harvest help" was reported on hand. (Morning Republican, Mitchell, S. Dak., July 13, 1919.)

²⁷Industrial Worker, October 30, 1920 (p. 2).

resulting in strife and arrest in such communities as Colby, Kans.; Aberdeen, S. Dak.; and Lakota, Langdon, Casselton, and Jamestown, N. Dak. In Colby the I.W.W. virtually dominated the town's farm-labor supply for a week, where some 1,100 harvest hands followed the standard "wobbly" tactics of forcing up wages through collectively refusing to work at the prevailing rates.²⁸ This policy came into general disfavor, as the labor supply after the war was made up increasingly of workers who were not I.W.W. members. "Job action" and slow-down strikes were found to be more effective in bringing employers to terms. One I.W.W. handbook cautioned its readers:

Waiting in town or in the "jungles" while holding out for higher wages is a poor policy. This tends to keep the organized men "on the bum," while the unorganized do nothing to improve conditions. The place to take action is *on the job* and it is the only way to get results. Other tactics that are harmful are soap-boxing by ignorant or inexperienced members and throwing unorganized workers off trains.

Tactics that have proved successful are: *take out organizers' credentials* at the "going wages"; line up as many of the crew as possible and then make demands if the conditions are not what they should be. The "slowing-down" process will be found of great help where employers are obstinate. (Agriculture—The World's Basic Industry and its Workers, Bureau of Industrial Research, I.W.W., Chicago, 1920, p. 26.)

The I.W.W. was defeated once and for all in midwestern agriculture, as mechanization and mass labor displacement finally eliminated most of the great Wheat Belt migration. The combine harvester, enabling 5 men to do the work of 320, cut and threshed the grain in a single operation. Local farm hands were thus sufficient in number to perform most of the required work. The demand for migratory workers decreased to a small fraction of its former volume. To quote Paul S. Taylor—

As the use of the combine spread, migratory labor declined, and with it labor radicalism and the social problems caused by a great male migration disappeared from the harvest fields. When radicalism came again to the Middle West it was the farmers who agitated and organized, not the laborers. (Migratory Farm Labor in the United States, p. 3.)

²⁸Don D. Lescohier: *With the I.W.W. in the Wheat Lands* (in *Harpers*, August 1923, pp. 375-378).

CHAPTER XXIII.—Unionism and Strikes in American Agriculture

Labor unionism in agriculture has been a rather anomalous and transitory development in the American economy. It has been composed of literally hundreds of organizations that were sporadic, scattered, and short-lived. They were often confused in aim and policy, enrolling various rural groups having little in common beyond a desire to protect their precarious economic status. Farm laborers and farm owners or tenants in some areas were organized in the same unions, while in other areas they were organized in separate bodies which attempted to cooperate on issues of common concern. Frequently the interests and attitudes of union members differed so sharply that the organizations lacked sufficient cohesion to survive minor crises or defeats.

The origin of many rural unions lay in spontaneous strikes which temporarily brought agricultural workers together to attempt collective bargaining. Many such outbreaks, however, failed to develop any sort of organization that could function after the strikes were settled. Those unions which did survive for more than one season in almost every case required continuous aid in money and personnel from nonrural groups. The few attempts to organize agricultural and allied workers in Nationwide unions affiliated to the leading labor federations were on the whole unsuccessful, despite cooperation and outright subsidy from trade-unions and other sympathizers in urban areas. A few unions of processing workers have been the only collective-bargaining organizations to remain in industries related to agriculture.

The conditions which made it difficult for seasonal farm workers to organize were the same conditions that made them vulnerable to agitation and strikes. The hardships which they suffered made them a problem group of great public concern, the true "forgotten men" of the thirties. Their extreme mobility, the high seasonality of their work, and the low wage rates all combined to make unionization among them costly and, at the same time, created chronic problems for the communities in which they lived. The social status of seasonal farm workers was that of a lower caste suffering poverty, depending upon relief, and lacking adequate facilities for education, housing, sanitation, and medical attention. They were, on the whole, politically impotent and, in many States, disfranchised. Public opinion in the communities in which they worked usually sided with employers and sanctioned the use of stern legal and extralegal measures for suppressing collective bargaining. The public held tenaciously to the traditional view of the family farm that agricultural laborers as compared with industrial workers had more security and benefited from the personal solicitude of their employers. The labor contract continued to be regarded as a personal bargain between equals, even when the employer was an absentee bank or land corporation bound by the rules of a trade association. Most protective labor legislation enforced by Federal and State governments still does not cover agricultural workers. A further reason for their hardships was the continuous competition from marginal labor groups—newly arrived immigrants, women, children, and unemployed from other industries. Surplus workers during the

thirties forced farm wages down to levels far below the minima established in other industries.

The more obvious hardships which periodically led to conflict were mitigated to some degree by appropriate Government action later in the thirties. Deficiencies in housing, health, and education among migratory workers were partially rectified through public subsidizing of such agencies as the Farm Security Administration. Exploitation from padrones and labor contractors, and uncontrolled advertising and other means for recruiting seasonal laborers, were reduced through more adequate supervision. Federal and State employment services brought about some improvements in labor allocation and job placement. They served to reduce wasteful transportation, local labor surpluses, and the burdens of underemployment and unnecessarily small annual earnings.

The related problems of surplus rural labor and organized conflict on the land became much less serious as a result also of unprecedented war production. Underemployment and acute poverty among wage workers virtually disappeared in many farm areas. During the war the growers with heavy seasonal labor demands faced a scarcity of workers. The large-scale operators specializing in one or a few cash crops were most vulnerable to unrest and strikes in a period of depression, unemployment, and labor surplus. During the war they were most vulnerable to crop losses arising from chronic labor shortages because of prosperity and expanding employment in other industries.

Organized labor and employers alike agreed that unnecessary loss of time and spoilage of goods from strikes or other causes must be avoided during the war. Indeed, both groups were concerned about recruiting an adequate seasonal labor supply to save farm crops in California and other States. Spokesmen of both the Associated Farmers and the C.I.O. State Industrial Union Council in California appealed to the Federal Government to allow the seasonal importation of several thousand Mexican workers to perform the necessary harvest jobs.¹ The Communist Party also expressed agreement with this policy.²

Widespread labor-employer conflict in agriculture, nevertheless, is likely to recur should the war-induced prosperity and full employment prove temporary. Little has been done to bring long-run improvements in wages, living conditions, job security, and opportunities for advancement on the land, and there is no apparent trend toward a permanent reduction of the scale of operations or the degree of specialization of farms in California and other intensive cash-crop regions. The present farm structure in many areas apparently continues to depend upon large supplies of cheap and mobile seasonal laborers. Even with the most efficient methods of allocating jobs, the workers required to harvest special crops without loss to the growers in many intensive large-scale farming areas would be too numerous and intermittently employed to earn adequate yearly incomes.

¹San Francisco Chronicle, June 23, 1942.

²See Communist Campanile (mimeographed Bulletin of the University of California at Berkeley Campus sections of the Communist Party and Young Communist League), Vol. I, No. 11, June 22, 1942.

In advocating a system of organized voluntary recruiting of students to perform seasonal farm work, this paper made the following observation: "Although the shortage of labor in California agriculture is not now acute, it soon will be. Many workers will be needed to harvest the valuable crops which are such an important part of the war effort. Government agencies, labor unions, and employer organizations have been busy on plans to relieve the shortage for some time. Importation of labor from neighboring States and Mexico will be a step towards solving the problem. Some organizations such as the A.W.V.S. have already contributed time in the fields."

An adequate standard of employment stability and annual income for farm labor, then, would require a drastic readjustment in the structure of agriculture in many regions. The effects of such readjustment would vary according to the technological requirements, land fertility, and market conditions in each special crop area. Higher labor costs would favor small diversified farms which rely upon unpaid family workers, at the expense of large specialized farms which depend upon cheap seasonal labor. Mechanization of farm operations would tend to increase, and farm workers would probably be displaced in growing numbers, a few to become farm proprietors and the majority to transfer to other industries. Marginal land would have to be abandoned in some areas, while in others the intensity of cultivation as well as the size of farms would have to be reduced.

Whatever the means by which the economic welfare of agricultural workers is to be improved and employer-employee conflict lessened, one important result seems almost certain: the direct cost of such improvement will be borne by the large-scale farms and, ultimately, the consuming public. In the past both groups gained from the low costs of production made possible by specialization based upon the use of cheap labor for seasonal operations. The title of one monograph on casual farm workers, by J. Lowery, was perhaps not far amiss: "They Starve That We May Eat."³ In the long run it is highly questionable whether the public in general really has gained from this situation. The social costs of deficiencies in health, education, and morale among seasonal farm workers, as well as the waste of misdirected, unused, or depleted labor power, may well have more than counterbalanced the advantages of low food prices. The real costs were made apparent in the thirties by losses arising from strikes and by the taxation required to pay for extra relief, law enforcement, and other services. Any lasting solution of the farm-labor problem must seek a permanent reduction in the supply of workers. Profs. M. R. Benedict and R. L. Adams of the Gianinni Foundation, University of California, conclude:

Ignoring for the time being the positions and relative bargaining strengths of employers and employees, society must, under conditions of surplus labor, seek a rough balance between the minimum wages it is willing to countenance and the amounts of land and labor to be kept out of agricultural production. (Methods of Wage Determination in Agriculture, in *Journal of Farm Economics*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, February 1941, p. 86.)

The failures of unionism and collective bargaining among farm workers in the past are not necessarily final, nor do they eliminate the possibility of labor conflict in the future. Many of the largest, most violent, and most ruinous strikes during the thirties occurred among nonunion workers. As long as the underlying circumstances which generate labor unrest in agriculture continue, strikes and other manifestations of class conflict are likely to recur, regardless of the temporary strength or weakness of unions. The violence and intensity of struggles in the past and their threat to the security and the civil liberties of other groups give the problem of farm-labor conflict an importance far greater than the numbers directly involved would indicate.

Overt conflict could probably have been reduced in many agricultural areas during the thirties by the judicious intervention of outside agencies.

³Published by the Council of Women for Home Missions and Missionary Education Movement, New York, 1938.

Stricter enforcement of laws and constitutional guaranties could have prevented much of the disorder and property damage, intimidation and violence, vigilantism, and suppression of civil liberties. The effectiveness of the law, however, was limited when rural communities were strongly conservative and sympathetic to the interests of property owners and employers. It is doubtful whether legal restriction alone could have prevented vigilantism and mob action, any more than the prevailing antagonism of the police and the general public to labor organization could have prevented unionism and strikes.

Strikes and other expressions of class conflict during the thirties might also have been reduced had there been more adequate mediation and arbitration. Strikes in commercial farming have been intense and violent, as they once were in railroad transportation, newspaper publishing, the manufacture of clothing, and other industries dealing with perishable commodities or services. Labor disputes in such industries subject employers and public alike to unusual risk, and a special means is necessary for their settlement before they erupt into open conflict.⁴

Mediation in agriculture during the 1930's was not very successful in settling farm strikes on an amicable basis of mutual compromise. The extreme perishability of crops and the brief duration of seasonal jobs in many cases precluded peaceful, patient, and orderly negotiations once a strike had begun. On the other hand, most of the boards or agencies which attempted to settle disputes before they became overt were unsuccessful because they were not established at the request of the contending groups, had no definite legal status, and lacked adequate means of enforcing rules or agreements.

Adequate arbitration of agricultural labor disputes apparently requires more thorough organization of farm workers and a wider recognition of their unions than have been achieved in most agricultural areas. Only by this means, perhaps, can farm-labor unions function effectively as collective-bargaining agencies. In the opinion of Professors Benedict and Adams, arbitration could be carried on most equitably and efficiently by permanent, legally recognized boards in which representative spokesmen of employers, employees, and the public would have an equal voice.⁵ Spokesmen of organized laborers would present demands for adequate wages, housing and perquisites, preferential hiring, job security, and continuity of employment; spokesmen of organized growers would present demands for wage levels which they could pay, assurance against strikes, availability of labor when needed, and the like. The weight of decision would rest upon the neutral public representatives, who would have to be "men of high caliber and judicial in temperament," as well as experts qualified to analyze and investigate accurately marketing and cost conditions. The arbitration board, having legal status, could seek enforcement through courts and other agencies of the wages and employment standards it decided upon.⁶

The ultimate objective of such collective bargaining and arbitration, if labor conflict is to be eliminated, would be the stabilization of employment and residence for workers actually needed in harvest operations, so

⁴For a fuller discussion of this point, see Paul S. Taylor: *American Mediation Experience and California Farm Labor*, in *The Commonwealth* (San Francisco), Vol. XII, No. 51, December 22, 1936 (pp. 223-227).

⁵M. R. Benedict and R. L. Adams: *Methods of Wage Determination in Agriculture* (in *Journal of Farm Economics*, February 1941, p. 82).

⁶*Idem* (pp. 83-85).

as to raise the average annual earnings. In the long run this would require seniority or preferential hiring agreements, combined with adequate wages, a thorough study of labor markets, and efficient job allocation. Surplus agricultural labor presumably would have to be absorbed by other industries or be maintained on relief.⁷

Voluntary collective bargaining and arbitration following these principles were used successfully for several years in the Santa Maria Valley of Santa Barbara County, Calif.⁸ Practiced in a small locality, however, these methods were limited in their ability to improve wages and working conditions because of competition from other intensive crop areas which were unorganized.

Several experts feel that voluntary arbitration functioning through representative labor and employer associations suffers one fundamental limitation, namely, that a board's decisions are likely to rest on a recognition of the relative strength of each party to an agreement; and in agriculture the bargaining power of labor is usually much weaker than that of the employer. Otis E. Mulliken, then Chief of the Labor Section of the Sugar Division, U. S. Department of Agriculture, reached the following conclusion:

Viewing past experience and present trends in this country, it seems to me that the nature of the developments will be governmental rather than voluntary, and will be concerned primarily with social problems of income and status rather than with problems of employer-employee relations.⁹

From this point of view poverty and discord on the land could be eliminated only through the extension to agricultural workers of such protective labor legislation as the Social Security Act, the National Labor Relations Act, and the Fair Labor Standards Act. Farm laborers in growing numbers during the 1930's became aware of their particularly disadvantaged and unprotected status. This knowledge in itself furnished constant fuel for agitation and unrest. The weakness of their bargaining position, indeed, would seem to warrant their right to even greater legal protection than is provided for the more strongly organized urban industrial workers.

The application of labor legislation and arbitration to agriculture would not present such formidable difficulties as generally supposed. As many writers have pointed out, only a fraction of all farm operators hire laborers at all, and they are concentrated in particular areas, on large farms hiring men in gangs rather than as individual hands.¹⁰ Enforcement of protective labor laws and arbitration awards in some respects would be easier in agriculture than in other industries because farm operators are more dependent upon the Government for protection from ruinous competition. As recommended by Frances Perkins, then Secretary of Labor, crop-benefit payments to all farmers could be made conditional upon their observance of required labor standards.¹¹

The establishment of standard wage and employment conditions, whether by arbitration, by legislation, or by a combination of both, would have to be Nation-wide. Wages and working conditions presumably would have to be standardized for competing crops, taking account of

⁷M. R. Benedict and R. L. Adams, *op. cit.* (p. 85).

⁸*Idem* (pp. 74-76).

⁹Otis E. Mulliken: *Discussion of Methods of Wage Determination in Agriculture*, in *Journal of Farm Economics*, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, February 1941 (p. 106).

¹⁰*Cf.* Arthur M. Ross: *Agricultural Labor and Social Legislation*, Ph.D. Thesis in Economics, University of California, Berkeley, 1941.

¹¹Otis E. Mulliken, *op. cit.* (p. 105).

differences in costs of living, transportation expenses, and productivity of land and labor. The effectiveness of arbitration or legislation would be neutralized if they brought substantial improvement for labor in only one area at a time. Even if local grower-employers were not placed at a disadvantage with their competitors, less-favored workers would be likely to migrate and create a labor surplus in the more profitable areas.

At this point the question of unionism and labor-employer conflict on the land becomes inseparable from the much broader problems of migratory or casual agricultural labor in general, and the submarginal position of agriculture as a major field of enterprise and employment. Protective labor legislation and Nation-wide arbitration of labor disputes in agriculture would almost necessarily have to be part of a more comprehensive program of general price control and, probably, subsidizing. The power to determine wage levels and conditions of employment, and hence a major part of production costs in agriculture, would seem to be a corollary of the Government's power at present to fix prices, restrict output, and compensate producers for losses they sustain.

The principle of Nation-wide arbitration and legislative protection of agricultural labor in competing crop areas, as part of a subsidizing program by the Federal Government, has already been applied in one form in the sugar industry. The Sugar Division of the Department of Agriculture holds public hearings annually to air the grievances and demands of representative employers and employees, and then sets minimum wages and standard conditions of employment for each factory district before the planting season begins. Logically, it would seem that a similar system could be extended to other farm crops. The Jones-Costigan Act of 1934 and the Sugar Control Act of 1937 established the principle that industries enjoying special protection or financial benefit from the Government should be required to maintain certain minimum standards of wages and working conditions. Almost all branches of agriculture received such special benefits during the 1930's.

The relative merits of labor legislation and arbitration as means for alleviating poverty, class conflict, and other farm-labor problems are matters of controversy. The conclusions rest upon the conceptions of the control that governments should have over economic affairs. Probably both means would be required for agriculture, as they have been for other industries. In any case, it seems more than likely that seasonal farm laborers in the future will continue to organize and act collectively to improve their situation. As long as wage levels and working conditions remain substantially inferior to those in urban occupations, labor unrest, unionism, and strikes will continue in rural areas. In the last analysis, farm laborers can gain economic security and improve their working conditions only if they can organize in large numbers as an economic and political pressure group. Advocates of labor legislation alone criticize voluntary arbitration and collective bargaining on the ground that farm laborers are unable to unionize effectively;¹² critics of this view, on the other hand, point out that legislation would be difficult to achieve and administer unless farm workers were well organized beforehand.¹³

Farm-labor unionism is likely to revive if the scale of farm operations increases. Agricultural undertakings in many crop areas are as large, commercialized, and efficient as other nonrural industries, and the trend toward large-scale production may continue. It is possible, then, that class

¹²O. E. Mulliken: *Discussion of Methods of Wage Determination in Agriculture.*

¹³M. R. Benedict and R. L. Adams: *Methods of Wage Determination in Agriculture.*

divisions in many types of farming will become wider and more clearly defined, and the incentive to organize correspondingly greater.

The rapid growth in membership and wealth of urban labor organizations that occurred during the war may furnish additional stimulus to farm-labor unionism in the future. As urban unions organize more and more industries and reach a growing number of unskilled workers, they have a greater incentive to support the collective-bargaining efforts of farm workers and, perhaps, small-farm operators.

Lower-income groups in the rural population are a threat to the security of industrial workers. Having uncertain employment and substandard incomes and working conditions, they furnish a labor pool that can be drawn upon to depress wages and break strikes in urban areas. Theoretically, however, farm workers and operators and industrial workers all have common economic interests. Small-farm operators and industrial workers alike would gain if the wages and working conditions on the land were improved. The operators, depending upon family labor, could compete more equally with the large agricultural operators employing wage labor. The industrial workers would also be more secure if the wages of farm labor were increased, since this would lessen the competition for jobs in urban industries. Viewed in this light, there are reasons to expect that workers in agricultural and allied industries may again organize in international unions which will function as an integral part of the broader labor movement in the United States. In the long run, indeed, farm-labor unionism of this kind may be in a strategic position to bring together organized small farmers and industrial labor for unified political action.

Appendix A.—Bibliography¹

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 Herald (Dadeville, Ala.), issues of February 29 and December 22, 1934; April 19 and 26, 1934.
 Record (Dadeville, Ala.), August 29, 1935.
 World (New York, N. Y.), November 26, 1929.
 Herald (Haines City, Fla.), issues of October 19 and December 21, 1933.
 Evening Ledger (Lakeland, Fla.), issues of December 13 and 15, 1933; January 3 to 5, 1934; January 14, 1937; January 28, 1941.
 Daily Chief (Winter Haven, Fla.), issues of December 14 and 28, 1933; April 15, November 18, 19, and 28, December 1, 5, and 8, 1938.
 News (Lake Wales, Fla.), issues of December 14 and 21, 1933; January 18, 1934.
 Evening News (Bridgeton, N. J.), issues of April 6 and 10, June 20 and 30, July 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11, 1934.
 Herald (Bridgeton, N. J.), July 11, 1934.
 Record (Philadelphia, Pa.), issues of July 9 and August 13, 1934; June 29 and 30, 1935; March 22, 1937; March 15, 1941.
 Courier (Camden, N. J.), March 14, 1938.
 Herald Tribune (New York, N. Y.), issues of August 13, 1939; March 15, 1941.
 Record (Wilkes-Barre, Pa.), issues of August 9 and 10, 1938.
 Evening Times (Trenton, N. J.), issues of July 18 to 20, 1938.
 Enquirer (Philadelphia, Pa.), July 27, 1938.
 Bulletin (Philadelphia, Pa.), August 3, 1938.
 News (Buffalo, N. Y.), issues of July 21 and 22, 1938.
 Observer-Dispatch (Utica, N. Y.), issues of July 14 and 22, 1938.
 Gazette (Middleboro, Mass.), issues of September 8 and 15, 1933.
 Union (Springfield, Mass.), issues of July 31, September 12 and 13, 1933; August 1 to 4, 1934; August 17 to 19, 1936; August 11, 1938.
 Courier (Wareham, Mass.), issues of August 31, September 7, 14, and 21, 1934.
 Post (Boston, Mass.), September 4, 1934.
 Star (Washington, D. C.), September 4, 1934.
 Globe (Boston, Mass.), September 6, 1934.
 Herald News (Fall River, Mass.), September 5, 1934.
 Herald (Boston, Mass.), September 11, 1934.
 Enterprise (Brockton, Mass.), issues of September 29, 1931; September 12, 1934.
 Courant (Hartford, Conn.), issues of July 19 to July 27, 1933; April 11, 1934; July 11 and 17, 1940.
 Citizen (Columbus, Ohio), June 22, 1934.
 News Bee (Toledo, Ohio), issues of June 25, 1934; June 8, 1935; May 26, 1938.
 Toledo Blade (Toledo, Ohio), issues of June 21, July 2 and 19, August 30, September 1 and 18, 1934; April 15, May 20 and 26, 1938.
 Journal (Milwaukee, Wis.), issues of July 19 and August 5, 1934; July 21, 1935; June 7, 1938.
 Journal (Dayton, Ohio), July 1, 1934.
 Times (Hammond, Ind.), July 16, 1934.
 Herald (Washington, D. C.), issues of August 28 and September 14, 1934.
 Journal Gazette (Fort Wayne, Ind.), August 27, 1934.
 Plain Dealer (Cleveland, Ohio), April 27, 1935.
 Journal (Lansing, Mich.), May 9, 1935.

Free Press (Detroit, Mich.), issues of July 24, 1935; May 20 and August 21, 1938.
 Times (Toledo, Ohio), issues of September 18, 1934; March 29, 1935.
 Republican Courier (Findlay, Ohio), issues of June 19 to 26, 1935.
 Times-Press (Akron, Ohio), May 19, 1938.
 Vindicator (Youngstown, Ohio), May 24, 1937.
 Sentinel (Milwaukee, Wis.), issues of May 27, June 1 and 8, and September 29, 1938.
 Post (Milwaukee, Wis.), May 5, 1939.
 Morning Republican (Mitchell, S. Dak.), issues of August 5, 1916; July 7, 12, 13, 19,
 26, 27, and 31, August 5, 10, 17, 18, and 21, 1917; July 29, 1918; July 13, 1919.

Appendix B.—Agricultural, Canning and Packing Unions Affiliated to the American Federation of Labor, October 1935¹

Citrus Workers Union No. 18234, Winter Haven, Fla.
 Federal Labor Union No. 18411, Clearwater, Fla.
 Sheep Herders Union No. 18458, Klamath Falls, Oreg.
 Federal Labor Union No. 18561, Hollywood, Fla.
 Federal Labor Union No. 18600, Greenwood, Ind.
 Dried Fruit Packers No. 18693, San Jose, Calif.
 Cannery Workers Union No. 18893, Oakland, Calif.
 Federal Labor Union No. 18902, Phoenix, Ariz.
 Federal Labor Union No. 18959, Orlando, Fla.
 Fruit Growers Union No. 19012, Watsonville, Calif.
 United Evergreen Pickers No. 19068, Centralia, Wash.
 Vegetable Packers No. 19115, Phoenix, Ariz.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19118, Anaheim, Calif.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19120, Ontario, Calif.
 United Citrus Workers No. 19180, Dundee, Fla.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19257, Fontana, Calif.
 Citrus, Vegetable and Farm Workers Union No. 19274, San Diego, Calif.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19289, Bloomington, Calif.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19329, Niles, Mich.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19399, Grandview, Wash.
 Horticultural Workers No. 19335, Middletown, Conn.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19495, Flagstaff, Ariz.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19465, Williams, Ariz.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19511, Vincennes, Ind.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19542, Coolidge, Ariz.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19581, Seattle, Wash.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19622, Louisiana, Mo.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19647, Longmont, Colo.
 Packinghouse Employees No. 19653, Fresno, Calif.
 Agricultural Workers No. 19654, Christiansted, St. Croix.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19663, Cleveland, Ohio.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19687, Sidney, Mont.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19706, Iroquois County, Ill.
 Agricultural Workers No. 19724, McGuffey, Ohio.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19775, Bozeman, Mont.
 Hay Balers Federal Union No. 19799, Yakima Valley, Wash.
 Farm Laborers Union No. 19845, Casa Grande, Ariz.
 Federal Labor Union No. 19137, Watertown, S. Dak.
 Agricultural Workers Union No. 19994, Blissfield, Mich.
 Agricultural Workers Union No. 19996, Bridgeton, N. J.

¹Rural Worker, Vol. I, No. 3, October 1935 (p. 2): "A number of these contain various types of workers. Some of them are weakly organized. In some cases the high initiation dues and fees have forced local groups to give up their charters. Practically all of them have been chartered within the past 3 years."

Appendix C.—Unions Affiliated to National Committee of Agricultural, Cannery and Packinghouse Unions¹

[A.F. of L. unions indicated by number.]

- No. 20471. Alabama Agricultural Workers Union, Birmingham, Ala.
 No. 19115. Arizona Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union, Yuma, Ariz.
 No. 18959. Citrus Workers Federal Labor Union, Orlando, Fla.
 No. 20366. Cannery Workers Union, Tampa, Fla.
 Citrus Workers Union, Lake Wales, Fla.
 Citrus Workers Union, Winter Haven, Fla.
 No. 19994. Agricultural Workers Union, Blissfield, Mich.
 No. 20027. Agricultural Workers Union, Findlay, Ohio.
 South Tenant Farmers Union, Memphis, Tenn.
 No. 20212. Agricultural Workers Union, Laredo, Tex.
 Agricultural Workers Union, Corpus Christi, Tex.
 Agricultural Workers Union, Brownsville, Tex.
- State Executive Committee, California Federation of Cannery and Agricultural Unions, representing the following:
- No. 20241. Agricultural Workers Union, Sacramento, Calif.
 No. 20324. Cannery Workers Union, Sacramento, Calif.
 No. 20221. Agricultural Workers Union, Stockton, Calif.
 No. 20205. Fish Cannery Workers Union, Monterey, Calif.
 No. 20099. Cannery Workers Union, Oakland, Calif.
 No. 20539. Citrus Workers Union, Santa Ana, Calif.
 No. 20328. Fish Cannery Workers Union, Martinez, Calif.
 No. 20325. Cannery Workers Union, San Jose, Calif.
 No. 20379. Cannery and Preserve Workers Union, San Francisco, Calif.
 No. 20289. Agricultural Workers Union, Arvin and Delano, Calif.
 No. 20195. Alaska Cannery Workers Union, San Francisco, Calif.
 No. 20686. Agricultural Workers Union, Mt. View, Calif.
 No. 18211. Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union, Watsonville, Calif.
 Agricultural Workers Union, El Monte, Calif.
 Cannery Workers Union, Richmond, Calif.
 Filipino Labor Federation, Lompoc, Calif.
 Confederacion de Uniones Campesinos Y Obreros Mexicanos (C.U.C.O.M.)
- Executive Board, Colorado Conference of Beet Field and Agricultural Unions:
- No. 20179. Agricultural Workers Union, Crowley, Colo.
 No. 20172. Beet Field Workers Union, Fort Lupton, Colo.
 No. 20169. Beet Field Workers Union, Fort Collins, Colo.
 No. 20207. Beet Field Workers Union, Brighton, Colo.
 No. 20185. Agricultural Workers Federal Labor Union, Fort Morgan, Colo.
 No. 20190. Agricultural Workers Union, Greeley, Colo.
 No. 20187. Agricultural Workers Union, Eaton, Colo.
 No. 20205. Agricultural Workers Union, Ovid, Colo.
 No. 20105. Beet Field Workers Union, Longmont, Colo.
 No. 20180. Agricultural Workers Union, Johnston, Colo.
- New Jersey State Committee of Agricultural and Cannery Unions:
- No. 19996. Agricultural Workers Union, Cumberland County, N. J.
 No. 20708. Agricultural Workers Union, Burlington County, N. J.
 No. 20633. Agricultural Workers Union, Atlantic County, N. J.
 No. 20318. Agricultural Workers Union, Monmouth County, N. J.
 No. 20224. Cannery Workers Union, Camden, N. J.
- North-West Council of Cannery, Packinghouse and Agricultural Workers:
- No. 18257. Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union, Seattle, Wash.
 No. 20479. Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union, Mount Vernon, Wash.
 No. 20228. Washington Fruit Cannery Workers Union, Olympia, Wash.
 No. 20296. Washington Cannery Workers Union, Bellingham, Wash.
 No. 20527. Cannery Workers Union, Hillsborough, Ore.
 No. 20251. Fruit Cannery Workers Union, Puyallup, Wash.
 No. 20292. Cannery Workers Union, Vancouver, Wash.
 No. 20515. Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union, Yakima, Wash.
 No. 20624. Cannery Workers Union, Hood River, Ore.

¹Rural Worker, Vol. II, No. 6, June 1937 (p. 2). These unions were represented at the Denver Convention in July 1937.

Appendix D.—Farm-Labor Strikes in California, 1933

Table 1.—Farm-Labor Strikes in California, 1933¹

Crop	Number of strikes	Number of workers	Number of days lost	Strikes		Locality of strike
				Won	Lost	
Peas.....	6	3,900	38,750	4	2	San Luis Obispo, Santa Maria, Niles, San Jose, Hayward, Elmhurst, San Leandro.
Lettuce.....	3	3,700	25,800	†	†	Imperial and Salinas Valleys.
Cherry.....	1	800	5,600	..	1	Mountain View.
Berry.....	1	1,500	45,000	..	1	El Monte, Los Angeles.
Apricots.....	2	2,200	10,400	1	1	Modesto, Eureka.
Peaches.....	8	5,050	34,150	8	..	Tulare, Chico, Merced, Gridley, Modesto.
Pears.....	3	1,600	7,800	3	..	Sacramento, Fairfield, San Jose.
Beets.....	2	1,550	21,700	..	2	Oxnard, Salinas.
Tomatoes.....	1	400	4,400	1	..	San Diego.
Hops.....	2	1,025	3,050	..	2	Sacramento, Healdsburg.
Grapes.....	5	8,250	57,750	5	..	Fresno, Lodi, etc.
Cotton.....	1	15,000	405,000	1	..	San Joaquin Valley.
Cantaloupes.....	1	2,000	4,000	..	1	Imperial Valley.
Prunes.....	1	600	6,000	1	..	Gridley.
Total.....	37	47,575	669,400	26	8	

¹Hearings, Committee on Labor, United States Senate, 74th Cong. 1st. Sess. on H. R. 6288, Washington, 1935, p. 343.

†Includes 3 strikes the outcome of which was unknown.

‡Unknown.

Table 2.—Monthly Summary of Farm-Labor Strikes in California, 1933

Month	Number of strikes	Number of workers	Number of days lost	Strikes		
				Won	Lost	Unreported
April.....	3	2,950	36,850	3	..	..
May.....	1	700	9,800	1	..	..
June.....	3	2,550	51,600	1	2	..
August.....	2	2,200	10,400	1	1	..
September.....	6	8,850	73,100	14	2	1
October.....	2	17,000	419,000	6	..	..
November.....	2	2,200	4,400	..	2	..
December.....	1	500	500	1	..	..
Total.....	37	47,575	669,400	29	7	1

Causes of strikes were as follows: Wages, 37 (100 percent); recognition, 9 (24.3 percent); conditions, 5 (16 percent); and hours, 5 (13.3 percent).

Table 3.—Organizations Involved in California Farm-Labor Strikes, 1933

Organization	Strikes		Men involved	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
C.&A.W.I.U.....	24	65	37,550	79.0
A. F. of L. affiliates.....	2	5.4	2,200	4.6
Independent.....	2	5.4	2,600	5.5
Spontaneous.....	6	16.1	3,725	7.8
Unknown.....	3	8	1,500	3.1
Total.....	37	100	47,575	100

Of the strike led by the C&AWIU, 21, affecting some 32,800 workers resulted in partial increase of wages to the workers, the new scale averaging 25¾ cents per hour, while 4 strikes, affecting 4,750 workers, were lost. Of the 2 strikes led by unions affiliated with the A.F. of L., 1 strike, affecting 2,000 workers, resulted in a compromise gain; the other strike, affecting 200 workers, was lost. Of the spontaneous strikes, 3 strikes, affecting 1,225 workers, were lost. Of the 2 strikes led by the independent unions, 1 strike, involving 600 wage earners, resulted in wage gains, while the other, involving 2,000 workers, was lost. For the 3 strikes classed under "unknown leadership," 2 led to gains in wages while the result of the third strike could not be determined.

Appendix E.—Agreement Between Mexican Workers and Japanese Growers

Agreement between Confederacion de Campesinos Y Obreros Mexicanos (C.U.C.O.M.) and Japanese Vegetable Growers' Associations of Los Angeles, July 1933

This agreement entered into between the Confederacion de Campesinos Y Obreros Mexicanos del Estado de California and the Japanese Vegetable Growers' Associations of Los Angeles, namely, Japanese Association of San Gabriel, Growers' Association of San Gabriel Valley, Venice-Palms Industrial Association, Japanese Association of Gardens, Palos Verdes Farmers' Association, San Fernando Valley Japanese Farmers' Association, Norwalk Farmers' Association, Japanese Association of Smeltzer, Montebello Japanese Industrial Association.

FIRST: It is agreed by the undersigned that \$2 for a 9-hour day is basic for a regular worker.

SECOND: A temporary worker (as distinguished from a regular worker) is one who is employed by an employer for less than 3 consecutive days of 9 hours and over. The temporary worker's pay shall be 25 cents per hour.

THIRD: Overtime for the regular workers shall be as follows: For the tenth and eleventh hours of continuing employment the wage shall be 25 cents per hour, for the twelfth and thirteenth hours the wage [shall] be 30 cents per hour and for the fourteenth and succeeding hours the wage shall be 35 cents per hour.

FOURTH: Overtime for temporary workers shall be as follows: For the tenth and eleventh hours of continuing employment the wage shall be 27½ cents per hour, the twelfth and succeeding hours the wage shall be 30 cents per hour.

FIFTH: Bad weather (rain, snow, freezing, etc.) that causes part-time work for regular workers shall be paid for at the rate of 22 and 29 cents per hour for that part of the day worked and the same man (who was compelled to cease work because of the bad weather) shall be put back to work when the weather permits.

SIXTH: If a regular worker works part of a day and sends a substitute to finish the day, or does not return to work himself, the wage for that day shall be at the rate of 22-2/9 cents per hour for such party or parties working.

SEVENTH: The wages for women in field work shall be \$1.75 for a 9-hour day, and 20 cents per hour for part time.

EIGHTH: No worker shall be paid less than agreed upon.

NINTH: This agreement shall be in effect for 1 year from date and shall remain in effect. Either party may file notice in writing as to desired changes, modifications and additions to this agreement and such notice must be filed with the Los Angeles Regional Labor Board and the other parties signing this agreement.

(Signed for the Growers)

SATONI SAIJO, President,
The Growers Association of San Gabriel Valley.
F. N. SHIMIZU, Secretary,
Japanese Association of San Gabriel.
R. NAGAGI, Secretary,
Venice-Palms Industrial Association.
JAMES K. SASAKI, Secretary,
Japanese Association of Gardens.
FRANK Y. YAZAWA,
Palos Verdes Farmers' Association.
K. MUKAEDA,
San Fernando Valley Industrial Association.
J. ITAYA,
TOM SAITO,
Norwalk Farmers' Association.
K. KAMIJA,
Japanese Association of Long Beach.

(Signed for the Union)
 GILERMO VELARDE, General Secretary,
 Confederacion de Uniones de Campesinos Y
 Obreros Mexicanos del Estado de California.
 N. OVILA, Secretary of the Interior.
 JUAN ORTIZ AVILA, Secretary of Exterior.
 J. M. HODGSON.

(Signed for the Los Angeles Regional Labor Board)
 J. L. LEONARD, Chairman
 DICK L'ESTRANGE, Board Member
 C. B. TIBBETTS, Board Member

(In the interests of section 9 above it was requested by the chairman of the board that a period of 3 months be used to test this agreement before consideration be given to changes or additions to the agreement. It was also understood that there shall be no discrimination against union workers, as this is covered by the law.)

Appendix F.—Organizing Tactics of the C.&A.W.I.U.

The tactics of the Communist leaders have been worked out carefully in the light not only of their own experiences, but those of the American Federation of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World as well. Following the 1933 strikes in California agriculture, a manual of tactics for conducting agricultural strikes was prepared which described the modus operandi in ample detail. It provided instructions—

1. For intimate surveys of the territory preceding a strike, including establishment of contacts with workers, small growers, and even large growers or their agents;
2. For setting the strike demands, which should be very few, and vital to the workers (in contradistinction to demands the leaders may think the workers ought to make), and for calling the strike at exactly the time "when the boss needs the workers most";
3. For organizing small meetings, then committees, in order to draw their workers, especially in the places from which large ranchers will draw their workers;
4. For calling a wage conference with broad representation, but "not so broad that it exposes itself to the police and growers";
5. For organizing the central strike committee, and for developing leadership among the workers;
6. For organizing auxiliary activities, such as relief finance, legal defense in co-operation with organizations such as International Labor Defense, negotiation, publicity through both strike bulletins and releases to the newspapers "answering the slanders against the strike, and presenting the workers' side of the struggle";
7. For enlisting maximum active strike participation of women, youths, and children, in relief on the picket lines, with children taught to play "workers against growers" instead of "cops and robbers";
8. For organizing and equipping union headquarters, to be open "where possible," with "reserve strike headquarters where comrades can gather in case the open headquarters are attacked";
9. For organizing picketing and defense "against vigilante attacks";
10. For making the settlement, taking into consideration the mood of not only the "vanguard of the workers," but also that of its "most backward sections";
11. For avoiding jeopardy of the success of the strike, or loss of confidence in Communist leadership, by premature issuance of leaflets, by excessive promises of the leaders, by exposure to seizure at a single time of all equipment or all leaders, by correction or immediate removal of leaders who show signs of discouragement;
12. For avoiding disruption by continual advance warning to the strikers of the guises in which it might come;
13. For bringing the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, The Trade Union Unity League, Communist Party, and Young Communist League to the favorable attention of the strikers, the first two by appealing to them as authorities on strike tactics, the latter two by utilizing "every incident in the strike to prove that the government is on the side of the bosses and that we must have also a party that will bring the government on the side of the workers."

Appendix G.—Strawberry Agreement

Agreement between Strawberry Growers and Strawberry Pickers in Sacramento County, April 1934

To whom it may concern:

I hereby agree to the following:

First: To pay 25 cents per hour to workers engaged in the occupation of picking strawberries on my ranch throughout the length of the present strawberry picking season, including all crops of strawberries during the season of 1934.

Second: That I will hear all grievances of my workmen through their own elected ranch committee.

Third: That I will pay all back wages due to my workmen before asking them to return to work.

Fourth: That I will pay my workmen at least once in every 2 weeks.

O. NAGAOKA

(Signature of Grower)

Signature of two witnesses

C. BASAY

F. ILARAINA

Appendix H.—San Diego County Agreements

Agreement with Japanese Celery and Vegetable Growers, San Diego County, July 1934

In the matter of *Japanese Celery & Vegetable Growers in San Diego County, v. The Workers*, complainant, before *Los Angeles Regional Labor Board*.

Pursuant to the agreement reached in the presence of O. C. Heitman, The Reverend John M. Hegarty, A. J. Cohn and Gordon S. Watkins (chairman), all representing the Regional Labor Board and acting as mediators and witnesses, on July 3, 1934, by and between the representatives of the Japanese Celery and Vegetable Growers in San Diego County, California, and the Workers, the following wages, hours and conditions of employment are hereby approved and declared to be effective for a period of *one year* beginning July 6, 1934, and ending July 5, 1935, within the geographical boundaries of San Diego County, California.

Since certain differentials have heretofore existed it is assumed and understood that this agreement does hereby establish a prevailing or minimum scale of wages to agricultural workers, it is agreed and understood as follows, to wit:

1. That hereafter the term "Steady Employment" shall be understood by all parties concerned to constitute *no less* than 9 hours per day and 3 weeks of 6 days a week.

2. That such uncontrollable and unforeseen circumstances and conditions as inclement weather and illness which make employment impossible shall not constitute an excuse for circumventing or violating the provisions governing "Steady Employment" as set forth in section 1 of this agreement.

3. That "Steady Employment" as set forth in section 1 of this agreement shall mean employment by one employer who shall be responsible for the payment of all wages involved.

4. That the term "Temporary Employment" shall be understood to mean less than 9 hours per day and less than 3 weeks of 6 days per week.

5. It is understood and agreed that all persons employed upon a temporary basis, which is as defined in section 4 of this agreement, shall be paid and receive the sum of 25 cents minimum per hour.

All persons employed on a steady basis, as defined in section 1 of this agreement, shall be paid and receive the minimum sum of \$2 per day of 9 hours. All "Steady Employees" as herein defined and designated who are required to work more than 9 hours in any one day of 24 hours shall receive for such time in excess of 9 hours the minimum sum of 25 cents per hour.

6. It is also understood and agreed by and between the parties hereto that the wages earned under this agreement shall be paid in accordance with the laws of the State of California, to wit: Immediately upon the discharge of an employee, and not less than twice a month for steady employees, such wages to be paid in cash or negotiable checks.

7. It is understood and agreed that the rates of pay herein stated are minimum rates and shall not prevent an employee from asking, or any employer from granting, a higher rate of wages in case both parties agree.

8. It is understood and agreed that any employee called to work shall be guaranteed not less than 4 hours of employment and shall be paid not less than 25 cents an hour.

9. It is also understood and agreed that the "Growers" will as far as possible reemploy such of their employees as received a higher rate than the minimum herein set forth at the same rate of wages as such employees were receiving at the time the strike took place.

10. It is understood and agreed that this agreement shall take effect immediately and shall remain in full and effective force until July 5, 1935, at which time further conference shall be held and the situation reviewed in the light of the existing conditions and facts, should either party to this agreement so desire.

Dated July 6, 1934.

*Agreement between Japanese Farmers and the Union of Laborers and Field Workers,
San Diego County, August 1934*

The Japanese farmers in Chula Vista, Otay Valley, Palm City, Nestor, San Ysidro, Bonita, Sunnyside, Spring Valley, La Mesa, El Cajon, National City, San Diego, Mission Valley, Pacific Beach, La Jolla and Del Mar, all in the County of San Diego, hereinafter called "The Employer" and the Union of Laborers and Field Workers, representing the majority of the field workers of Mexican and other nationalities in San Diego County, hereinafter called "The Union Laborers," this day enter into the following contract.

1. This contract shall be in effect for a period of one year from the date on which it is signed by the representatives of both parties.

2. The employers and the union laborers agree that there shall be no cessation of work, strike, walk-out, or lock-out during the period of this agreement. Both the parties solemnly contract that they will conscientiously and in good faith attempt to carry out all terms of the contract. It is understood and agreed that the above agreement is binding to the parties hereto.

3. The employers agree to pay the union laborers when hired and actually at work a minimum wage of 25 cents per hour.

4. The employer agrees to guarantee the union laborers at least 4 hours' work at 25 cents per hour on the day he calls said employee to work and immediately following the hour for which the employee has been called.

5. The employer agrees that at least 60 percent of all field workers employed and working at any one time shall be members of the Union of Laborers and Field Workers. The remaining 40 percent of the employees need not be union members.

6. It is understood and agreed that two Japanese or one Caucasian American and one Japanese shall be exempted before the above calculation of 60 percent of all employees is made. School children during vacation or immediate relatives temporarily helping the employer shall also be exempted from the said arrangements as outlined in section 5 above.

7. It is understood and agreed that the 60 percent union laborers must be satisfactory workers to the employer, and the employer reserves the right to discharge any number of said 60 percent union employees if they prove unsatisfactory, providing, however, that any vacancy created by such discharge shall be filled only by a member of the Union of Laborers and Field Workers.

8. Any controversy between the employer and the union employees shall be settled in the following manner.

(a) A union representative shall as a first step present the grievances to the employer involved. If a satisfactory adjustment is not made, then

(b) Union representatives shall present the grievances to the employer representatives signatory to this agreement. The employer representative shall then within 5 days arrange for a meeting between such agents of the employer as they may designate, and the union representatives. At this meeting every effort shall be

made to amicably settle the differences. In the event, however, that the differences are not settled at this meeting,

(c) The employees or aggrieved parties may present the dispute to an arbitration committee consisting of the following persons:

Mr. A. V. Mayhofer (chairman), 1572 Second Ave., San Diego;

Rev. John Hagarty, 346 Beech Street, San Diego;

Mr. O. C. Heitman, 302 California Bank Bldg., San Diego.

Each member of this committee shall be supplied with a written copy of the complaints and details pertaining thereto.

The chairman of this committee shall call for a hearing at such time and place as suits the convenience of this board, but within 10 days of the date of filing of the complaints with the chairman.

(9) The decision of this board may be majority vote and shall be accepted as final and binding by the above parties to this agreement.

(10) The union laborers agree that the Union of Laborers and Field Workers shall always be willing to assist the employer to supply or replace labor whenever such labor is required by the employer, leaving to the employers discretion what constitutes a good and satisfactory employee.

In witness whereof we have hereto set our hands and seals this 13th day of August at San Diego, Calif.

Representing Japanese Farmers

I. KAWASHIMA

EYNO KAWARMURA

Union of Laborers and Field Workers

MARTIN OMENDAIS

J. C. ESPINOSA

MIGUEL DELGADO

JUAN D. GONZALES

ANTONIO DEL BUONO

E. H. FITZGERALD, U. S. Commissioner of Conciliation

(Seal)

Appendix I.—News Notes and Bulletins of a Threatened Strike in Maricopa County, Ariz., March-April 1939

(1) C.I.O. Circular: Notice of Public Hearing:

The American Way

"Sheriff Lon Jordan asserted in the Public Press, that a small group of 'Agitators' are attempting to cripple the Salt River Valley's lettuce harvest by 'stirring up' trouble among the workers.

"Sheriff Jordan said he is watching closely and is prepared at a moments notice to dispatch a large force of men, to any sector of the valley, to quell any uprising and throw the ring leaders in jail.

"These statements are false and inflammatory. We feel their purpose is to stir up public sentiment against these American citizens.

"There are no agitators in this union at all. The organizers of this union are American citizens that have come here to work and make their home. The members of this union have chosen them as their responsible leaders, as every other organization has a right to, and does.

"There is no intention on the part of the union to cripple the lettuce harvest. There is no danger of an uprising in the Salt River Valley. We feel there is no danger of unlawful acts, only from the law-enforcing agencies. All these workers are doing, is to band together for mutual benefit, protection and bargain collectively with the various employers as to wages and conditions of work—right guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the law of the land."

A Public Scandal

"Here is our grievance. The lettuce field workers in Salt River Valley are not getting a fair deal. This fact has been apparent so long, that it has become a public scandal. Yet nothing has been done about it. The workers are taken to the

fields by the contractors in trucks at 15 cents a head. They have to get to the field by 4 a.m., but do not start until hours later. Their pay does not start until the work starts. The hours they have to wait is on their own time. Swell, isn't it!!! But that isn't the worst of it. They work an hour, two hours seldom as much as five hours a day. Try paying rent, food, doctor, and clothing bills, and raising a family on wages and hours, rated thus. These workers need the American Standard of Living."

The Workers' Proposals

"To eliminate the most glaring injustices, we submit the following minimum program to the contractors and growers:

1. Recognition of the Union as the Workers' bargaining agency.
2. Free transportation to and from the fields.
3. A minimum of 45 cents an hour, instead of 25 cents.
4. Guarantee of 4 hours' work for each day called.
5. Time and one-half for Sunday and holiday work.
6. Time and one-half for all work over 8 hours daily.
7. No discrimination because of Union membership.
8. Payment in cash or by check, not in grocery orders."

Let the Public Decide

"Does any fair minded person think these demands are excessive? This is the workers' side of the story. They will explain it more in detail at a public hearing April 5th. They want the growers to come and tell their story. They invite Sheriff Jordan to substantiate his statements before the public. Then let the public decide, and not as the final judge. The workers want to settle their dispute in the American Way.

PUBLIC HEARING

TOWNSEND HALL 128 N. 3rd Ave.

WEDNESDAY APRIL 5th. 8 P.M.

Auspices Arizona Field Workers Council and Arizona Steinbeck Committee
902 East Jefferson"

(2) News Clipping from Phoenix Gazette, March 30, 1939:

Agitators Nag Workers

"Sheriff Lon Jordan asserted Thursday that a small group of 'agitators,' describing themselves as representatives of the Committee for Industrial Organization, are attempting to cripple the Salt River Valley's lettuce harvest by 'stirring up' trouble among the workers.

"The 'agitators,' said to have come here from California, warned several days ago that a strike would occur if their demands were ignored, but the deadline which they set passed without incident.

"Revised working schedules and a fixed rate of pay are among the demands which were submitted to employers of the workers.

"A prominent shipper said Thursday that the valley's 5,000 or 6,000 harvest workers are 'well satisfied' and desire to make no trouble.

"The 'agitators,' he declared, were basically interested in the dues which they would collect from workers if they were successful in enlisting them in their organization to carry out their strike threats.

"It's just a shake-down,' the shipper said, 'and many of the workers know it.'

"Sheriff Jordan said he is watching the situation closely and is prepared at a moment's notice to dispatch a large force of men to any sector of the valley to quell any uprising and throw the ring leaders in jail."

(3) Editorial in People's World, San Francisco, April 3, 1939:

Slave Conditions on Arizona Farms

"Associated Farmers Terrorize Workers, Threaten Bloodshed if
Union Acts to Obtain Wages for Labor on Farms

"Phoenix, Ariz., April 2.—Terror, danger of violence by armed vigilantes, and Sheriff Lon Jordan's threat to jail anybody who tries to lead a strike, keeps hundreds of unwilling lettuce workers at practically slave labor near here.

"Jordan, Maricopa County's sheriff, has issued a press statement saying that 'small groups of agitators from California' are here to 'try and start a strike in the lettuce fields of the Salt River Valley' and that they belong to the C.I.O.

"I am watching the situation closely and am prepared at a moment's notice to dispatch a large force of men to any sector of the valley to quell an uprising of the lettuce workers and throw the ring leaders in jail," he said.

"REAL MENACE—But Associated Farmer leaders are more violent in their threats than the sheriff. The following statement by Lea Ogden, son of Ed Ogden, lettuce field contractor, is attested to by Mr. M. H. Powers, who headed a committee of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America to Ogden, to ask him to negotiate union agreements and somewhat improved conditions for his workers.

"Powers swears Ogden told him:

"We just want you to call a strike—we are ready—you all will be shot down like dogs!"

"Firearms have been widely distributed among the members of the Associated Farmers.

"Lettuce workers are told to be in the fields at 4 o'clock in the morning and then are not permitted to work until 9 a.m., causing them to lose 5 hours' time, or two-thirds of a normal day's pay.

"Workers are hauled to the fields in trucks by contractors like cattle. But they do not ride free like cattle. They pay 15 cents for the truck ride.

"Some times, after waiting 5 hours, they are allowed to work only 2 hours, and as their pay is usually about 25 cents an hour, their day's pay, minus transportation, is pretty small.

"UNION DEMANDS—Even relief is used against them. The contractors expect their workers to get on relief to support themselves, and regard the money actually paid them for picking lettuce as some kind of gift.

"The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. is asking for recognition of the union as bargaining agent, free transportation to and from the fields, minimum wage of 45 cents an hour, guarantee of 4 hour's pay for each day they are called to the fields, time and a half for Sundays and holidays and all work over 8 hours, no discrimination against union members, and pay in cash or check.

"The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. urges organizations and individuals to protest to Arizona officials and to the U. S. Department of Labor in Washington."

(4) Circular of the C.I.O.—U.C.A.P.A.W.A.:

*Field Workers! Join the C.I.O.
You Can Get—*

"1. Better Wages.—The C.I.O. has obtained higher wages for 2 million workers during the past 2 years. The total increase in wages has meant an additional 2 billion dollars in the hands of the workers to spend for food, clothing, rents, cars, and other things that workers want and must have.

"2. Better working conditions.—The coming of the C.I.O. has improved the working conditions of nearly three million workers. Hours have been shortened; safety conditions made for millions of workers who toiled under unsafe and unsanitary and unhealthy conditions; and the C.I.O. has helped to create new laws to protect the workers nationally and in all the State legislatures.

"3. Guarantee your rights under the Constitution of the United States.—Workers are being denied their rights of free speech and assembly, not only in Arizona, but all over the country. Strong unions guarantee your Constitutional rights. Where there are no trade-unions, as in Germany and Italy, the workers don't dare to raise their voices in protest against the terrible working conditions, long hours, and small pay. But Germany and Italy are not the only examples which can be cited. The field worker has not dared to raise his voice against his conditions till the unions came. Now he can speak. When he speaks, he is backed by thousands of his fellow workers all over the country. In union there is strength.

"4. Obtain aid from Federal, State, and county agencies! Many workers are unable to obtain aid from the Federal, State and county governments, but if they act through their union, these agencies are quick to respect their rights under the laws and give them aid."

Appendix J.—Race Conflict in the Yakima Valley, Wash.

Race conflict in the Yakima Valley, as in other intensive agricultural areas which rely upon large supplies of low-paid seasonal labor, develops when competition for jobs becomes acute. In periods of serious labor surpluses this underlying conflict sometimes becomes overt, in the form of rioting and mob violence.

Anti-Filipino outbreaks on the Pacific Coast began in Washington, and occurred later in Oregon and California. The first riot, according to several Filipino labor leaders, broke out in the Wenatchee Valley in 1928, and spread to other parts of the State. Several observers attributed the disturbances to the fact that Filipinos had been "playing around with white girls." The underlying cause, however, appears to have been job competition with whites. Truckloads of Filipinos recruited from Seattle to pick apples were reported stopped and forced to return to the city. A similar outbreak occurred in 1933 in the town of Toppenish, Yakima County, when unemployment among field workers was most serious.

Scattered instances of anti-Filipino prejudice and violence continued throughout the thirties. In the town of Wapato some Filipinos were held up and robbed of their money while in a gambling game. According to several observers, the sheriff refused to press a full investigation or make a serious effort to apprehend the bandits. In September 1937, State highway patrolmen and deputies deported 50 Filipino strikers from the county and threatened them with violence if they returned. (See Chapter XIII.) During late 1936 and early 1937 Filipino farm tenants and owners in the Yakima Valley were reported being evicted and threatened with mob violence. (See *Philippine-American Tribune*, Seattle, Vol. VI, No. 2, January 27, 1937, p. 1.) A Filipino journal in Seattle quoted a Yakima newspaper's account of one incident:

"Hard-fisted, weather-beaten white ranchers from the lower Yakima Valley swore solemnly before Senator Lewis B. Schwellenbach that there soon will be bloody race riots that forever will be a blot on this State if the Federal Government does not move against Filipino and Japanese who unlawfully are crowding out the whites."

The attitudes of employers to Filipinos showed wide variation. One large hop grower interviewed in Moxee stated a preference for Filipinos because they didn't need supervision in their work as did the whites. He found Filipinos to be more stable and reliable, as well as faster and more "nimble-fingered" in their work. Also they were a compact group who lived in bunkhouses and had their own cooks. Hence they were much less trouble than individual white families, who needed individual tents and cooking facilities, individual "tabbing" of their pickings, and the like.

Other growers, however, claimed that they would not hire Filipinos because they were difficult to mix with other races in the field. Perhaps a more important reason for the antipathy of many growers was the fact that Filipinos, as a compact group, were more likely to organize and bargain collectively one way or another. If a grower antagonized his Filipino laborers, they often carried out a type of "slow-down" strike—they would "no savvy" the boss's orders, so that supervision became impossible.

As Filipinos decreased in number and relative importance in the Yakima Valley, racial and sectional prejudice was directed increasingly against other groups: Mexicans, Negroes, and, finally, out-of-State migrants who were native whites of much the same background as the older residents of Washington.

Single male "hobos" or "bundle-stiffs" of the type which formerly belonged to the I.W.W. have long been subject to hostility and sometimes violence in the Yakima Valley. As late as the summer of 1940 it was reported that a "jungle" had been raided and large numbers of men driven from the Valley. They were under suspicion of incendiarism, after a large packing-shed in Yakima burned down.

Widespread and growing antipathy to Negroes became apparent in the Yakima Valley during the late 1930's. A liberal and prolabor paper, the *Yakima Valley Farmer*, drew attention to the dangers of competition from Negroes in an editorial in the issue of June 30, 1936 (p. 4):

"How would the laboring men of the Yakima Valley like to have a Negro colony settle here? We wonder if it is generally known that such a movement is under way, instigated and sponsored by interests anxious to have the Valley flooded with cheap labor?"

The answer to this question became clear as the number of Negroes in the Valley increased during the late thirties. The constitution of the State of Washington prohibited discrimination against racial or religious minorities. "White Trade Only" signs nevertheless were displayed increasingly in the windows of restaurants and service establishments. Many residents attributed their appearance largely to the huge influx of migrants from Texas and other Southwestern States. Many of them went into small businesses in the Valley, and many of their customers also were from the South.

In July 1938, an anti-Negro riot broke out in the town of Wapato. According to several observers, the Town Marshal and a "bunch of pool hall bums" drove from town scores of Negroes, including women and children, both resident and transient. (See *Portland Oregonian*, July 11, 1938, p. 1.) The usual explanation for such outbreaks was offered, viz., that a Negro had insulted a white woman, but investigators from the sheriff's office confessed themselves at a loss to discover the real cause. (*Portland Oregonian*, July 11, 1938.)

Resentment against another group, the Mexicans, developed when the Utah Idaho Sugar Co. imported several hundred from California and other States for beet-field work. The *Yakima Valley Farmer* was highly critical of both the employers and the laborers. In its issue of April 29, 1937, it published on the front page a verbatim copy of a hand-bill in Spanish which the company had been circulating in California to recruit Mexican and Filipino workers, as follows:

"ATENCION"
BETABELERAS
Mexicanos y Filipinos
Fimilares y Solteros
Salidas Gratis en el Tren
Pagamos \$13.00 per Acre
Tenemos bastante betabel list ara
desahijares en
El Valle de Yakima
Washington
En El Camino Proveemos
GRATIS Comido GRATIS
Pasaje
Oportunidad
Absolutamente No Seran Descantades

	DESAHIJE	\$7.50
\$13.00	Primero Escarda	2.50
per	Segunda "	1.50
acre	Limpia	1.50

Tabien Tenenos Betabel Mas Tarde
en El Territorial de Bellingham, Wash.

Pota Mos information consultan a Muestrros Agentes
Russell's Employment Agency
1010½ Second St., Sacramento, California
Agentes de le
Utah Idaho Sugar Compania
Salidas de Sacramento, California, el dia.

This paper charged the Utah-Idaho Sugar Co. in Toppenish with refusing to accept the local Employment Service official's offer to provide resident unemployed to do beet work. (*Yakima Valley Farmer*, April 29, 1937, p. 4.) The *Yakima Morning Herald* approved the importation of Mexicans. The *Yakima Valley Farmer* in reply commented that the former "evidently is not very familiar with Mexican laborers," and described them in its issue of May 6, 1937 (p. 4) as follows:

"Just about everything that is said about the Filipino is applicable to the Mexicans—even to the twanging of the guitar. They may belong to the white race, but they are still undesirable citizens for this country."

A long letter published in the *Yakima Valley Farmer* of April 29, 1937 (p. 4), perhaps expressed attitudes held by many local residents:

"As a native of Washington, I am writing you in behalf of my fellow workers. I do not believe the residents of the Yakima Valley realize just what is being

done in regards to the daily shipments of foreign labor in that section of Washington. Enclosed you will find a pamphlet quoting the prices offered to Filipinos and Mexicans for harvesting the sugar beet crop. The State of Washington has always been a wonderful place in which to live, but if this type of labor is allowed to enter by the thousands, it will only be a matter of a few years and Washington will be flying a “foreign flag” the same as California. There has always been enough labor to plant and harvest the crops without importing the undesirables of the world. Why start it now when thousands of American citizens are idle and capable of doing this work if given the opportunity and a living wage. Aside from a fair wage, these so-called “California Eskimos” are having their transportation paid to enter that renowned country of the white man.

“A short time back the Chief of Police of Los Angeles put pickets of State highway patrolmen on the California border to prevent the flow of unemployed Washingtonians into California. He is quoted as saying that there was no room in this State for those “half-starved stump farmers.” And now this great metropolis is evidently considering this yellow race a menace to California’s progress and have chosen the State of Washington as an outlet for their undesirable surplus labor. If you residents of Washington still believe in the supremacy of the white race, it is about time you look over the fence and see what is taking place.

(Signed) “Gilbert J. Boldt”

Complaints were directed also against hop growers who had distributed circulars throughout the Pacific Northwest, advertising for more hop pickers than were needed. Orchardists at the same time had sent out their own advertisements for labor. Many hop pickers then could not be absorbed in fruit work; many were left stranded, and went on relief where possible.

The large influx of “dust-bowl refugees” from Southwestern and Middle Western States created the most serious problems of labor surplus and job competition in the Yakima Valley during the late thirties. The antipathy that formerly applied to imported nonwhite racial groups now became directed to a large degree against native white immigrants from other States. Competition for jobs was most severe during 1938. Employment and earnings fell during the drastic recession of that year, at the same time that the drought migration to the Pacific Coast reached a peak. These conditions stimulated the growth of a local or sectional labor movement which aimed primarily to secure jobs for residents of Washington, in preference to migrants from other States. The Washington Agricultural Workers Association was organized for the purpose in July 1938 and within a few weeks claimed more than 500 members. Its attitudes, as expressed by the organizer, Frederick Brown, were conciliatory to employers and hostile to outside workers. As quoted in the Spokane Spokesman Review of August 20, 1938 (p. 2):

“Our organization is not fighting for wages, because we realize that under present conditions the farmers cannot pay high wages. Our object is mainly to get the farmers to employ Washington workers and not transient workers from out of State. The farmers can get Washington workers if they call at the Employment Bureau in Yakima.”

The attitude of workers and farmers in the Yakima Valley to outside labor has been, briefly, ambiguous and confused. Racial antipathies apparently have been based upon the underlying factors of competition and insecurity. Insofar as non-resident workers usually have been imported by large growers and processors seeking supplies of cheap labor, one would expect the resentment of disadvantaged resident workers to be “class conscious” in tone. However, in rural communities where the population is strongly conservative and holds the individual rights of the property-owner sacred, resentment tends to be focused against aliens of all types, or merely nonresidents as such.

Appendix K.—The “Yakima Incident” of 1933¹

The most serious labor conflict in the history of Yakima Valley occurred in 1933, a year of widespread unrest and strife in agriculture throughout the country. At that time seasonal laborers in the Northwest were composed predominantly of single male casuals, a volatile element which had long been exposed to I.W.W. doctrines. The large family migrations created by drought conditions in the Middle and South West had not as yet developed on a significant scale in the area.

A large number of these idle transient workers from other areas had gathered in Yakima some time before the apple and hop harvests were due to begin. Relief for residents had been cut materially during July, and public relief to transients was almost completely discontinued. The field for agitation was fertile, and a few members of the I.W.W. found considerable response to their ideas and organization plans. Mass meetings were held in the Yakima City Park during the first part of August and the idea of strikes became strongly imbedded in the more radical elements, who spread their doctrines among the more peaceful. A series of small outbreaks or "disturbances" developed more or less spontaneously among scattered groups. "Unemployed councils" organized by Communists were also reported active, having a membership of almost 2,000 in Yakima City alone.

Growers became alarmed at the situation, and organized themselves into "farmers' protective associations." Forming bands of "vigilantes" in several sections of the Valley, and arming themselves and their loyal workers with pick handles and other weapons, they were prepared for any disturbances. In isolated instances workers were severely beaten by farmers. (Yakima Morning Herald, July 17, 1933, pp. 1-2.)

The situation came to a head on August 24. A group of approximately 100 pickets arrived at Congdon's Orchards to call a strike, and were met by a hurried assembly of about 250 farmers armed with baseball bats and pick handles (some with holes bored through the middle and ropes wrapped around them, according to one observer). A brief battle ensued, with bats and missiles flying. After a few minutes the farmers because of superior numbers and arms forced the workers to surrender. They were then surrounded and herded in a mass to Yakima, where 61 of them were booked in the county jail. A later protest meeting in town was dispersed by National Guardsmen using tear gas bombs.

For the rest of the season all highways and freight trains were watched by highway patrolmen to see that no transients stopped in the Valley. A truckload of hired workers was even picked up by State officers and taken back to the Coast. (Yakima Morning Herald, August 26, 1933, p. 8.) National Guardsmen raided transient camps and hobo "jungles" and destroyed all property to prevent their reestablishment, fearing that they would be centers of agitation. (Idem, p. 1.) All public meetings of workers in the Valley were banned during the remainder of the year.

Meanwhile a stockade of heavy timbers was built, having barbed wire strung around the top of the wall, and a catwalk on the outside for patrolling purposes. In this "bull pen" the prisoners were herded awaiting their trial. Several, it was reported, were lashed by officials in the jail, then released and "taken for rides" by vigilantes. One worker claimed that he was left beside the road with a swastika clipped in his hair and the red letters "U.S.S.R." painted on his welted back. (Idem, August 30, 1933, p. 1.)

The less militant of the prisoners were released when they had satisfied the police that they were not Communists and were not attempting to overthrow the government. The rest were tried for "criminal syndicalism" (Idem, August 29, 1933, p. 1), but the charge was later changed to "vagrancy." At the trial on December 17, after 105 days in the "bull pen," 12 pleaded guilty and the remainder were released on the condition that they were to stay out of the county for a least 1 year. The cost of the disturbance to the county was almost \$32,000 (Idem, September 7, 1933, p. 1), which the county tried unsuccessfully to collect from the State Relief Board. At the outset of the affair the lawyers representing the laborers proposed that the money which ordinarily would be spent on the trial be set up as a labor fund to be used by farmers to pay higher wages, but the prosecuting attorney refused any such compromise. (Idem, September 1, 1933, p. 4.) The lawyers also suggested mediation courts for discussion between farmers and workers, but the plan was not even considered.

Organization efforts among agricultural workers virtually disappeared for several years after this incident. The violence and ruthlessness was due in large part to a real fear among farmers and property owners that violent outbreak, if not revolution, was imminent. After public hysteria had died down, labor relations became more stable. Several "vigilantes" expressed a feeling of guilt for the role they had played

¹Most of this section was summarized from an account written by R. R. Wakefield: *A Study of Seasonal Labor in Yakima County, Washington, M. A. Thesis, 1937. State College of Agriculture, Pullman, Wash.* This has been supplemented by material gained from local newspapers and in personal interviews with participants in and observers of "the incident."

in 1933 when under the spell of public hysteria. Some were reported later to have refused to join the Associated Farmers, a branch of which was organized in Yakima during 1937 to combat labor unions.

The "stockade," however, still stands in Yakima as a threat to any radical labor organizers in the Valley.

Appendix L.—Antilabor Farmers' Organizations in Washington¹

Farmers in Washington are in a much better position to present a united front than are the laborers. They are acquainted with one another personally and live in close contact the year round, their interests are closely identified with their farm enterprise, and, unlike laborers, when they organize they face no violent opposition from other groups. Common dangers to their interests have always brought speedy and united action from them. Social and business cooperative organizations have been immediately converted into protective associations, and mass meetings in time of stress are held daily and are well attended. The I.W.W. threat in Yakima during 1933 brought immediate action. Vigilantes organized and armed themselves, passed resolutions, appealed to government agencies, public opinion, and the press for support. It is interesting to note that whenever any group of laborers gathered or any signs of trouble appeared in 1933 the farm operators and their faithful followers would hasten to the locality in large numbers. In one instance a group of Grand-view farmers turned out with their customary pick handles only to find the cause of the disturbance to be a family quarrel. (Yakima Morning Herald, September 1, 1933, p. 1.)

After the main disturbance of that year was suppressed there was little need for farmers' organizations to continue. Little was heard of them until 1936, when they rose in opposition to the tactics of the Teamsters Union, which was demanding union drivers for all fruit trucks that were not owned by farmers themselves. They were also opposed to the increasing unionization of city businesses, as they were afraid of eventual labor domination over farms.

In August 1936, the Farmers Protective Association was organized at a meeting held in the Chamber of Commerce headquarters in Yakima. It was designed to combat unions in the fields and packing sheds, as well as in Yakima City itself. (Official Report of Proceedings before the NLRB, February 28, 1938, Case No. XIX-C-298 in matter of Ross Packing Co. and U.C.A.P.A.W.A. Yakima Valley Local No. 1, p. 355.)

The first public announcement by this organization was set forth in a quarter-page advertisement on page 5 of the Yakima Morning Herald, July 26, 1936:

Fair and Unfair as Farmers View it

"We farmers of the Yakima Valley, several thousand of us, of our own free will and accord, believe it necessary to express our convictions concerning a labor problem which is threatening.

"We admit the right of an employee to join a labor union if he desires. We grant his right to quit his job, but we will not tolerate intimidation.

"We insist that if employer and employee fail to arrive at mutually satisfactory terms, the employee shall leave the premises peaceably; further, if another is hired to fill the job vacated, the new employee shall not be molested.

"Organizing laborers into a union is one of the oldest and most moth-eaten rackets in existence. We call it a 'racket' advisedly and from long personal experience. Many hundred men in the community have at one time or another joined labor unions and quit because they were out of sympathy with the policies unions practice.

"Were it not for this fact and the further fact that a good employer is the best friend any employee ever had, the employees of this country would long ago have been welded solidly into union ranks.

"This fetish of the unions as operated today, particularly in this locality, is not used to better working conditions, adjust poorly paid occupations, and relieve distressed workers. It is used as a leverage by one group to secure an unfair advantage at the expense of others. One group wants more than its share of the total pay roll.

¹Taken from Richard R. Wakefield, *op. cit.*, and local newspapers.

"For this reason it seems opportune to say that we will oppose furthering of closed-shop influences in this community with every resource at our command. In all cases, our interests are not mutual, but widely divergent.

"The index of demand for our products is the consumers' dollar. Today it is being eaten entirely by concealed taxes and the cost of distribution. This condition leaves the farmer without funds to meet operating expenses.

"More burdens on us would be confiscatory. What we have, we have worked for through long hours and by self-denial. We propose to keep it at any cost. These are fighting words and we know it. We purposely use them in preference to the weasel kind.

"Make no mistake about our meaning. All who aid and abet practices which threaten our well-being are included in our list of natural enemies."

This organization depended to a great extent on financial support from non-farm groups, in return for which it combated attempts to organize nonfarm as well as farm labor. According to President L. O. Bird, the association "almost went broke towards the end of 1937, but 'produce row' (i.e., packing and shipping companies in Yakima) came to their financial assistance and told them to carry on." (NLRB Report, v. supra, 469.) The Ross Packing Co. which the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. was trying to organize at the time, contributed \$75 to \$100, although membership dues were only \$2 per year. (*Idem*, p. 1010.)

The association opposed the activities of conservative urban unions as well as radical organizations of farm laborers. Members of the association on August 27, 1937, addressed an open letter to Yakima retail merchants, favoring the general application of the "open shop" principle:

"This letter is written in the hope that you will bring this policy to the attention of other retail dealers and they individually as a unit will stand behind it and assist the association in carrying out its program. In return the association assures you it will lend every assistance to those merchants who recognize and endeavor to maintain the open-shop policy." (Yakima Morning Herald, August 28, 1937, p. 1.)

The association was assured cooperation of State highway patrol officers in preventing members of the Teamsters Union from stopping trucks on the highway to learn whether drivers were union members. L. O. Bird said: "If necessary we will follow our trucks in automobiles. One farmer carried a shotgun to get a load of hay to the Coast." (Spokesman Review, September 17, 1937, p. 5.)

Bird also claimed complete support of the Yakima County Commissioners, who pledged themselves to see that WPA workers, when conditions necessitated it, would be laid off WPA to work on farms. (NLRB Report, op. cit., pp. 468-9.) Clyde Galloway, C.I.O. organizer, protested this policy of "flooding the Valley with cheap labor" (Spokesman Review, September 16, 1937, p. 1), and a committee of the Workers Alliance met with Frank Boisselle, County Commissioner and large-scale hop grower, to protest the cessation of WPA projects. (*Idem*, September 21, 1937.)

In September of that year the association adopted a schedule of wages to govern the picking and packing of fruit handled by its members, including both farmers and packing houses. (Yakima Morning Herald, September 24, 1937, p. 1.) It announced publicly that it was opposed to the organization of fruit, cannery and packing-house workers, by either the A.F. of L. or the C.I.O. Said L. O. Bird:

"I understand the C.I.O. is bringing in organizers from Seattle, but we do not need outsiders to tell us how to run our business. We will not stand for them visiting workers in the field or in packing houses during working hours, and at no time will we stand for any agitation from these organizers. The association has been working for fair wages throughout the entire fruit industry and as high wages as possible are being paid. I thought we made it clear we want no organization of fruit workers."

At one meeting it was proposed to form a "pick-handle brigade," to intimidate and beat up U.C.A.P.A.W.A. organizers distributing handbills. (NLRB Report, p. 186.) Bill Wood, who was distributing C.I.O. literature near the Libby, McNeill & Libby plant in Yakima was attacked, his literature was torn up, and he was warned to stay away from the plant. (Spokesman Review, September 16, 1937, p. 1.) A meeting of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. held in Selah was attended by about 100 farmers, several of whom were officers and members of the F.P.A. They warned union organizers under threat to leave the Valley. Discriminatory firing of U.C.A.P.A.W.A. members took place at plants of the Ross Packing Co. of Selah and the Washington Dehydrated Food Co. (NLRB cases No. C-882, decided August 14, 1939, and No. C-962, decided March 4, 1939.)

Ordinarily conservative unions affiliated to the A.F. of L. likewise experienced violent opposition on certain occasions from organized farmers. The Yakima Morning Herald in an issue of February 3, 1938, reported on its front page an incident in which "blue denim farmers carrying pitchforks scattered a group of alleged union men today and successfully defended the privilege of unloading their own potatoes." Again, in eastern Washington, an attempt by organizers of the Electrical Workers Union to organize a rural electrification project and apply union wagescales and working standards resulted in violent opposition. The Portland Oregonian reported that "hastily summoned embattled Whitman County farmers and their country town aides 'escorted' two union representatives to the county line today after handbills had called for a strike on a rural electrification project." (Idem, April 6, 1938.) George Mulkey of Seattle, international representative of the union, claimed that they threatened to hang him and his assistant.

During this period meetings were held and plans were made to reorganize the Farmers Protective Association and affiliate it with the Associated Farmers of California and Oregon into a "Pacific Coast hook-up." Colonel Garrison, president of the Associated Farmers of California, campaigned in the Yakima Valley to "sell" his organization, and members in Yakima planned to go to Lodi to confer with the Colonel. (Yakima Morning Herald, September 24, 1937, p. 1.) In November 1937, the Farmers Protective Association was dissolved and its members absorbed into the newly formed Associated Farmers of Washington, embracing seven counties—Yakima, Skamania, Klickitat, King, Pierce, Snohomish and Skagit. (Idem, November 4, 1937.)

In December a convention was held in which the Coastwise Associated Farmers was formed. (Yakima Morning Herald, December 15, 1937, p. 2.) Resolutions were passed asking for definitions of agricultural labor so as to exempt not only farm labor but all branches of agricultural work, such as processing, packing and transporting of produce and fruit, from the provisions of the Wagner Act, and thus from jurisdiction of the National Labor Relations Board. (Idem, December 28, 1937, p. 1.) The members reaffirmed their opposition to unionization of their farm employees, and particularly to the imposition of the closed shop and hiring halls in agriculture. (Idem, December 15 and 21, 1937.)

The executive board of the Associated Farmers of Yakima County at a meeting early in January 1938 formulated plans to support any business house which took a stand in favor of operating an "open shop" (Idem, January 4, 1938) and to boycott cities where unions would not permit farmers to unload their own produce. (Idem, February 12, 1938, p. 10.)

The formation of the Associated Farmers of Pierce and King Counties, where several strikes of field laborers and cannery workers had occurred previously, was announced in a full-page advertisement in the Puyallup Press of March 9, 1938:

*A Statement by the Associated Farmers of
Pierce and King Counties*

"Associated Farmers is not a vigilante organization and is opposed to violation of law and order by any group.

"Associated Farmers is not against labor unions. The members of this organization recognize the right of labor to organize and the right to quit work if they so desire, but we are definitely against interference with men who want to work. Our efforts are not directed against reputable union officials' but against radical agitators seeking to exploit the cause of labor.

"Associated Farmers is sincerest labor. In fact one of the main purposes of this organization is to insure to every person their right to work if they so desire.

"Associated Farmers is not organized for the purpose of lowering wages. We urge every member to pay the highest wages consistent with sound operation of his business.

"Associated Farmers is sincerely interested in the preservation of law and order, as that law and order relates to the harvesting, processing and movement of crops of these counties along the highways.

"*General purpose:* Associated Farmers of Pierce and King Counties was brought into being as a result of disturbances that have tended to prevent the harvesting of crops and their movement to market. The belief was that by organization and a continued campaign of education, the threats of Communists and other radical agitators could be met and obliterated; that a condition could be created and maintained under which men who wanted to work would be permitted to work; that workers would be protected in their right to employment under terms suitable to them; and that farmers could be protected under the law in the growing of their

crops, the harvesting and processing of the crops, and their movement along public highways to market.

"With the above purpose in mind, a group of representative farmers met and decided to call an organization meeting on October 1, 1937. The meeting was held with an attendance of over 100 farmers representing every district and line of agriculture in the counties, and with L. O. Bird, president of the Farmers Protective Association of Yakima, as principal speaker.

"State-wide Move: The entire State is facing radical activities inimical to the normal harvesting, processing and transportation of crops. Associated Farmers of Pierce and King Counties is but one of several similar organizations in Washington, while the State associations of Oregon and California have representation from over 50 counties.

"Need for Organization: The need for such an organization as the Associated Farmers of Pierce and King Counties has been forced upon the attention of farmers here by repeated riotous disturbances in various agricultural districts of California, Oregon and Washington. During the past 4 years 37 labor disturbances have been deliberately fomented by radical agitators who are NOT workers and have less interest in the welfare of workers than the overthrow of established government.

"Associated Farmers of Pierce and King Counties

Postoffice Box 697—Auburn, Washington.

"B. R. Smith—President—Kent Joel Olsen—V. P.—Puyallup
R. M. Smith—Secretary—Auburn"

"Directors

"H. Dykstra—Auburn—King County	A. Portman—S. Tacoma—Pierce
L. L. Houston—Enumclaw—King County	L. M. Hatch—Alderton—Pierce
H. Jensen—Issaquah—King County	L. Sutter—Spanaway—Pierce
Van Brand—Issaquah—King County	Sam Olsen—Orting—Pierce
	J. C. White—Orting—Pierce
	H. Gloyd—Puyallup—Pierce"

Appendix M.—The "Green Corn Rebellion" in Oklahoma¹

Cotton farming is notoriously favorable to tenancy, and because of this and the conditions under which the land was settled, eastern and east-central Oklahoma had always had a particularly serious tenancy problem. Not all the farmers in this section were impoverished tenants, but they were sufficient in number and activity to generate widespread and dangerous unrest.

Though but faintly understood, the theory of socialism gave to these people a new hope and promise of equality. So much so, that by 1911 the party had won one-third of the votes in Seminole, Pontotoc, Pottawatomie, Hughes and Pittsburg Counties. But the idealistic program of the Socialists in time became as unsatisfactory as that of the Tenters Union, and by 1914, many of the farmers were toying with the idea of syndicalism.

In the latter part of 1914, a militant secret organization known as the Working Class Union had sprung up in Arkansas. Its leader was Dr. Wells LeFevre of Van Buren's "Hobo Hollow," and its program—although highly idealistic—was one of action rather than aims. It advocated the abolition of rent, interest, and profit-taking; Government ownership of public utilities; and free schools—and proposed revolution as the means to the end.

Although the union soon spread into Oklahoma, where it established a number of lodges, the improvement in the economic status of the farmers, as Europe turned to America for war supplies, caused it to wane before it was well-rooted. By the spring of 1917 most of the local groups were inactive.

Then H. H. "Rube" Munson, allegedly an I.W.W. leader from Chicago, came into the Canadian River country. Munson effected a radical reorganization of the union, enlisting younger and more spirited men and appointing "captains" to assist him in the drive. The promulgation of the National Draft Act, just when the farmers were beginning to emerge from years of poverty, aided him in his work. Declaring

¹Taken from *Labor History of Oklahoma* (pp. 39-41).

that as drafted men were sent to the front, women, children, and old men would be forced to bear the brunt of farm production, he aroused deadly resentment against conscription, against the rich, and against the Government.

Theoretically, the W.C.U. was an international organization, but it is generally acknowledged that most of its members were in eastern Oklahoma. The exact membership is unknown, since each local lodge was practically autonomous and records were seldom kept. But, according to Dr. LeFevre, the union had 34,800 adherents. John Spears, Roy Crane, and Munson were the main leaders in Oklahoma. Others prominent in the organization were "Captain" W. L. Benefield of Lone Dove community, and Homer Spence, a farmer living near Tate, the State secretary.

On June 7, 2 days after the date set for registration by the President's proclamation, 5 men were arrested at Seminole and charged with draft resistance; the first of a series of similar arrests that continued throughout the summer. The plan at first was to hide men of draft age in the wooded country near the Canadian River; but these defensive tactics were discarded for acts of violence. Arms and dynamite were obtained; the waterworks at Dewar was blown up, and nine members of the W.C.U. were arrested and charged with the offense. Water mains and sewers were dynamited at Henryetta.

Several "armies" were organized and sent into the field subsisting on barbecued beeves "requisitioned" from the countryside and wagonloads of roasting ears (from which the name, Green Corn Rebellion). County sheriffs made up posses of citizens and moved against the rebels, but the mutinous farmers withdrew. They had planned to march to Washington—a few days distant, in the opinion of many of them—to take over the Government for the people. They had not contemplated shedding their neighbors' blood, and they refused to do so. The only fatalities were two members of the rebel army.

The revolution ended early in August. It was estimated that 2,000 farmers, including Negroes and Seminole Indians, had taken part in it; and more than 450 were arrested and held for trial. Of these, 193 were charged with draft resistance; 8 (leaders) with seditious conspiracy; and the remainder were freed or paroled. Eighty-six men were convicted by the Federal courts.

Appendix N.—Unionism and Strikes Among Citrus Workers in Florida

THE UNITED CITRUS WORKERS AND THE GENERAL STRIKE OF 1933

Considering the duration of the strike and the number involved (1,600) there was a rather remarkable absence of violence, intimidation, or arrests. This was due partly to the careful policy of the union itself, which in the course of many meetings had laid great stress on the importance of maintaining order. The strikers, being local residents with a vote (Florida being one of three Southern States having no poll tax) received a good deal of consideration from local authorities. (Critics of the union claimed that some of the organizers and officials of the U.C.W. belonged to the Ku Klux Klan, and that it was through the influence of this society with local authorities and business groups that the union was not handled more roughly.)

The local newspaper, the Lake Wales News, took a definitely neutral position, while deprecating the stoppage of work as a hardship for a community whose income depended primarily on harvesting and shipping citrus fruits. On December 14, 1933, the day that the strike broke out, a front page editorial appealed for a calm handling of the situation:

"It is certainly no time to 'rock the boat', or resort to extreme measures which can result only in lasting detrimental effects. * * *

"After all, everyone concerned with the present situation must continue to make up the citizenship of this community, and some settlement of the controversy can be reached amicably which will prove lasting and beneficial to those concerned. Both workmen and packing operators have their points of view, one claiming the wages too low and the other claiming it impossible to bear increases until the grower is given more for his fruit. * * *

"Above all, let's be sane and reasonable. It's the time for careful, constructive thinking."

Early in the first week of the strike a conference designed to settle the strike was held between directors of some of the major packing houses, and representatives of the U.C.W., including J. T. Hardie of Avon Park, president, J. E. Howell, J. W. Chapman, and J. H. Langley, local union presidents of Lake Wales, Haines City, and Auburndale, respectively. These leaders were misquoted by one local newspaper as stating that the strike was unauthorized, and was caused by "hoodlums and trouble-makers." (Lakeland Evening Ledger, December 15, 1933.)

Early in the second week of the strike George W. Raymaker, Secretary of the Regional Labor Board, and E. H. Dunnigan, Commissioner of Conciliation from the U. S. Department of Labor, entered the area in an unsuccessful effort to help both sides reach a settlement. (Lake Wales News, December 21, 1933.)

No serious trouble was indicated at other centers along the "ridge" section—Frostproof, Haines City, Winter Haven, Waverley, and Auburndale—though minor spontaneous walk-outs were reported in a few groves.

Open hostility from local police rarely occurred. According to one former union official, a machine gun was temporarily set up in order to intimidate the strikers, under the guise of being a "demonstration" by a salesman. A lawyer retained by the packing house was also reported to have used strong pressure to have the National Guard brought in, but the Commandant, after investigating the situation, felt that there was no need for such extreme measures.

The attitude of relief authorities, however, was more hostile. A newspaper quoted Maj. William Steitz, in charge of reemployment under the CWA program, as saying that men who quit work would not be eligible for work relief, because the recovery program did not call for any such procedure. (Lakeland Evening Ledger, December 15, 1933.) Growers in Palm Beach County complained that they faced a labor shortage because they were unable to compete with CWA. Local and county officials then announced that no one would be permitted to take a CWA job who could find work elsewhere, "regardless of the wage." (Idem, December 18, 1933, p. 1.) During the third week of the strike, after the regular seasonal shut-down of packing plants during the Christmas holidays, leaders of the Florida citrus industry were reported to have conferred with CWA officials "in an effort to end labor troubles in the fruit region." Growers and shippers protested that laborers, particularly Negroes, quit their jobs in groves and packing houses to obtain work on CWA projects because the CWA paid better wages than the citrus industry. Thus, it was argued, when the workers were unemployed and got on CWA or direct relief, they refused to work when the packing houses opened up. (Idem, January 2, 1934, p. 1.) Union officials, on the other hand, claimed that this conference was a direct effort on the part of growers and shippers to break the strike and the U.C.W. itself, by persuading the CWA administrators to close down projects and decrease relief wages below the prevailing 30c per hour in order to flood the citrus labor market with the competition of surplus unemployed. A few days later E. R. Bentley, Polk County Administrator of CWA, made the public statement that packing houses, groves, and other industries must assure a "living wage" and give employment steady enough to enable the workers to support their families, before they would be released from the CWA for private employment. (Idem, January 5, 1934, p. 1.)

The strike ended after 1 month with a compromise gain to the union. On January 11, 1933, the day before the strike ended, the six packing companies involved published two half-page advertisements in the Lake Wales News to justify to the public the position they had taken:

"To The Public

"The undersigned employers of packing-house and grove labor in this community feel that the time is at hand to inform the public of their position in the citrus workers' strike and have chosen this method of presenting the facts in the case in order to clear up much of the misunderstanding existing in some circles. We believe an open-minded and fair appraisal of all the facts will convince anyone that the employers have done everything possible to improve the position of the labor under present conditions.

"When the fruit season opened last fall there was a great surplus of labor in the community, and in order to spread employment as much as possible and allow all the labor to get some share of the pay roll it was the policy of the operators to employ much larger crews than really were necessary to efficiently perform the work. Inasmuch as practically all packing-house labor is paid for on a piece-work basis it is obvious that the average pay check was small. It is likewise true that

due to the low price of the fruit the packing houses have been obliged to operate somewhat intermittently.

"In practically every instance the rate of pay, both for piece work and hour work, has been appreciably raised from that paid a year ago. At the present rate of pay offered to labor a satisfactory living wage can be earned by anyone who is a competent worker—\$3.15 per day, \$15 to \$28 per week. Babson Park—\$4 per day for pickers. Strikers claim the lower scales as average.

"One element which seems to have been entirely overlooked in this ill-timed labor controversy is the debt-burdened grower upon whom all the expense falls in the last analysis. The grove owners are the mainstay of this community, and upon their welfare depends almost entirely the welfare of every merchant and businessman and laborer, for unless the growers can keep their property up, the groves will die and Lake Wales and Babson Park will become deserted villages.

"According to the records published by the State Marketing Bureau, the grower received last year a net return of 1½ cents per box, and this did not include the payment of taxes. To date this year fruit has sold for less than a year ago, yet the wages for picking and packing have increased. Regardless of what amount is paid to labor it will be more than the grower gets.

"To Whom It May Concern

"We, as a committee representing the undersigned packing houses, announce that in the near future we will open our respective packing houses and operate same.

"That until further notice, our rate of pay to those employed by us in the various capacities will be as follows: (as in above statement)

"The offices of the various packing houses listed below will open immediately to receive applications for the positions we have available, provided such applicants are willing to work under the wage scale as set forth above.

"We have not in the past, and will not in the future, discriminate against any person because of his or her membership in any association of any kind.

"We expect to retain in our employ any person who is competent, and discharge him or her when he or she is not competent, according to our judgment regardless of his or her affiliations. We agree to hear any committee of our employees or any complaints and deal fairly and impartially with them.

(Signed)

- Mountain Lake Corporation
- Highland Park Packing House
- Babson Park Citrus Growers
- Lake Wales Citrus Growers Assn.
- Mammoth Grove Incorporated
- Thomas E. Boyd Incorporated."

A week after the strike had been settled, the packing companies and the U.C.W. both announced the terms in public statements published in the Lake Wales News of January 18, 1934. The packing companies listed the new schedule of wages in detail, as follows:

"Notice to The Public

"With the strike settled we desire to make the following statement:

"Prices paid in some packing houses for labor before the strike was 12½ cents to 20 cents; others paid 20 cents to 25 cents, while some paid as high as 25 cents to 30 cents. The general price for picking was 3 cents, 6 cents, 12 cents and the general price paid for packing was 3 cents to 6 cents, while some paid 3½ cents and 6½ cents.

"The general price paid for grove work was 15 cents to 25 cents, including tractor drivers and truck drivers. In some instances grove labor was paid as low as 10 cents and 12½ cents per hour.

"Here is a copy of the contract upon which the strike was settled, together with prices which are to be paid hereafter:

"We hereby announce that we shall open and operate shortly our respective packing houses, and until further notice the rate of pay will be as follows:

	<i>Cents</i>		<i>Cents</i>
Packing Oranges	7	Picking Oranges	7
Packing Grapefruit	4	Picking Grapefruit	4
Packing Tangerines	6	Picking Tangerines	13

	<i>Cents per hour</i>		<i>Cents per hour</i>
House labor .....	.25 to 30	Truck drivers	30
Graders	30	Checkers	35
Dumpers	30	Grove labor:	
Car loaders	35	White	25
Loaders in field	30	Colored	20

"The offices of the various packing houses listed below are now open for employees to return to their former jobs, to the extent of present requirements, all employees not immediately set to work to be taken on as and when their services are needed, said employees to be paid according to the above wage scale, until further notice.

"We will retain in our employ such of our employees as are competent and will not discriminate because of their membership in any organization.

"Each organization named below will hear any individual or committee of its employees upon any complaint and will deal fairly and impartially with them.

"The above notice is published on behalf of and by authority of the following corporations:

(Signed)

Mountain Lake Corporation
 Highland Park Packing House
 Babson Park Citrus Growers
 Lake Wales Citrus Growers Assn.
 Mammoth Grove Incorporated
 Thomas E. Boyd Incorporated."

The union's announcement to the public accepted the above terms of settlement, and concluded with the following statement:

"We further desire to state that our contract was under negotiation when the strikebreakers were brought in, and fear had no hand in making the settlement that was reached. The only hold-up at the time being that the committee must be recognized. We thank the police department of Lake Wales for their spirit of good fellowship and believe that members of our union conducted themselves throughout the strike, so it was absolutely unnecessary for the deputies to have been appointed as they were not needed at any time.

"We wish to thank the merchants and other business people of Lake Wales and all other people that helped us in any way for their loyal support and with our increased wages we hope to do our part toward making Lake Wales a bigger and more prosperous community.

Local Number 104, United Citrus Workers of Florida

By: E. C. Mason, Deeley Hunt, J. K. Stuart
 Authorized Committee."

THE U.C.A.P.A.W.A. AND THE GENERAL STRIKE IN THE WINTER HAVEN DISTRICT, 1938

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. encountered more hostility than had the U.C.W. in attempting to organize citrus workers in Florida. It had suffered adverse newspaper publicity from the beginning (see Chapter XVIII) and the union faced even more of this when it became involved in strikes.

The major campaign organized by the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in Florida was a general strike of citrus workers in the Lake Alfred-Winter Haven district during November and December 1938. It began in one plant in Lake Alfred, as a spontaneous protest against a wage cut in the industry. Ed Norman, secretary-treasurer of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. in Florida, claimed that "employers had combined to attack the whole wage structure of the citrus industry, and that the union was prepared to spread the walk-out to other houses." (Tampa Morning Tribune, November 27, 1938, p. 9.) The union leaders were convinced that the employers had organized beforehand to smash the union. This was to be accomplished through a concerted wage cut in all plants to precipitate a strike, which could then be broken if the companies cooperated and filled one another's orders. The Tampa Morning Tribune on December 14, 1938, reported that a conference of growers with officials of the Florida Citrus Exchange resulted in a "gentlemen's agreement" to refrain from giving recognition to the C.I.O. union, and to deal only with individual picking crews. According to officials of the union, strong pressure was brought to bear to prevent

individual concerns from recognizing the union. Those that did, it was claimed, faced ostracism and near-ruin. A plant at Frostproof, which had recognized the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. after a strike during the fall, was reported forced to close down owing to pressure from creditors.

Meanwhile, picket lines were maintained around the struck plant at Lake Alfred. On November 23 the manager, W. A. Standord, attempted to reopen the plant and groves with two skeleton crews of about 30 men, some of whom were claimed to be members of the crew that had gone on strike. (Tampa Morning Tribune, November 24, 1938, p. 12.) A crowd of some 400 men, recruited from thirteen other packing houses in Polk County, assembled in front of the plant and prevented the crews from working in the groves in defiance of the strike order.

The local newspaper, the Winter Haven Daily Chief, violently denounced such picketing. In a front-page headline in the issue of November 21, 1938, it stated that "MAYOR JOHNSON ASKS FOR SIX SPECIAL DEPUTIES TO HANDLE CROWD" and in an editorial on "The Labor Situation" it expressed its views in no uncertain terms:

"The laborer has a perfect right to bargain individually and collectively. If he doesn't wish to work for the wage offered he has the right to quit. *But he has no right to say some other individual shall not take his place.*"

Mayor Johnson of Lake Alfred, on the other hand, expressed himself as being gratified that there had been no trouble. He complimented both the strikers and their supporters as well as W. A. Standord "for their behavior." (Tampa Morning Tribune, November 25, 1938, p. 10.)

The U.C.A.P.A.W.A. leader asked Mayor Johnson to mediate the strike "until a settlement is reached through negotiation." Ed Norman, secretary-treasurer, reported that the mayor "promised to be fair to both sides and that he would look into the committee's complaint that officers had been assisting the company in penetrating picket lines." (Idem, November 27, 1938, p. 9.)

The strike became general on November 28, and brought an immediate reaction from local authorities and newspapers. The Winter Haven Daily Chief, in its issue of November 28, assailed the main strike leader, Ed Norman, as follows:

" * * * a fairly good business man. * * * who seems to have grabbed the right end of the labor proposition, standing on the receiving end of the line along with Jack Lewis and telling the boys when and how to pick, instead of grabbing a bag and picking himself. * * * The part they play in this world series for grits and side-meat is in telling others what to do, wearing good clothes, and drawing fat salaries that their dupes chip up, while they play politics and mumble-de-peg."

Newspaper attacks on the union and its leadership became more personal and threatening in tone as the strike continued. W. "Dad" Lee, Editor of the Winter Haven Daily Chief, wrote an "Open Letter to Ed Norman" (secretary-treasurer of the U.C.A.P.A.W.A. for Florida) in the issue of December 1, 1938, as follows:

"Now, my young friend, suppose you stand to prevent the fruit movement and it should rot on the ground under the trees. (*We have no fear that you can do so!*) Who would suffer? Whose children would be disappointed this coming Christmas? Whose wife and babies would be neglected and lack the necessities and luxuries of life? The answer can only be the children and wives of your friends and my friends. Who will be responsible should this occur? Don't you suppose Ed Norman would be blamed by some people, if not all? Should more serious crimes result, who would be to blame? Better consider these things carefully, Eddie, before it is too late. Think hard and give the boys good advice. There is such a thing as mob spirit, you know. Once aroused, this is sometimes quite hard to direct and control.

"Sincerely,

"Your old friend,

"Dad' Lee."

The only mob action to develop occurred after agreement to end the strike had been reached at a general meeting of the strikers and, according to the strikers, after the meeting had broken up. On the night of December 5, 1938, about 400 hooded members of the Ku Klux Klan paraded through Lake Alfred, Auburndale, and downtown Winter Haven, in protest against "six or seven strikers in particular and the strike in general." (Idem, December 8, 1938.) The leader of the K.K.K. parade, who would not reveal his identity, expressed his views as follows:

"We believe in the principles of Americanism, and do not intend to tolerate

strikers and radicals. If there are labor differences they can be settled over the conference table. We know who the radicals are, and we shall take care of them in due course." (Tampa Morning Tribune, December 6, 1938, p. 1.)

Appendix O.—New Jersey Situation

The following (Communist) interpretation of the situation in New Jersey is from report, *Some Aspects of the Work in South Jersey*, by Leif Dahl, State Organizer, United Farmers League of New Jersey, 1935:

"Among certain sections of the liberal population, as well as large blocks of conservatives, it is taken for granted that rural areas are ipso facto condemned to support fascism. The history of fascism in Germany and Austria would seem to bear them out. In Germany especially it was in those rural areas near large industrial centers where Hitler experimented with his fascist organizational forms by breaking farm worker strikes, and where he recruited most successfully his Storm Troop battalions which later moved into the larger cities.

"It is easy to understand why certain highly capitalized rural areas are excellent breeding grounds for fascism. In Germany, as in all capitalist countries, one of the most exploited sections of the population was and is the rural proletariat. They toil long hours for incredibly low wages during the growing season and suffer the inadequacies of relief diets the remainder of the year. In rural areas with a large agricultural worker population class conflicts assume extremely sharp forms, both on the part of the struggling workers and the reactionary landowners and rural industrialists. These agricultural worker struggles in Germany presaged by months or a year similarly sharpened industrial conflicts in the large urban centers. The strike-breaking technique and demagogic program developed in rural areas proved, with slight variations, to accomplish similar results in cities.

"In the United States we are witnessing a similar development. The terror unleashed against striking agricultural workers in southern California, New Jersey, Ohio, and Florida by American Legion and Vigilante bands is one of the same nature and essence as Hitler's early activities around Munich and Berlin. And during the San Francisco general strike it is important to recall that much of the raiding of workers' offices and halls was captained and engineered by the experienced Vigilante heads imported from neighboring rural areas.

"It is not surprising that certain groups of anti-Fascists look despairingly upon rural areas, or that aspiring American 'Fuehrers' conduct their chief attention to our countryside.

"However, experiences in southern New Jersey the past 8 months have demonstrated in practice that incipient and even well-organized Fascist movements can be hindered and smashed.

"Southern Jersey is even more susceptible to violent antilabor attacks than southern California. The principal industry of the section is growing and packing of vegetables. Here one finds a larger farm and cannery worker population per square mile and a greater capital investment per tilled acre than anywhere in the country. Explosives factories and Government-subsidized munitions plants abound. Glass factories, clothing mills and a few chemical plants complete the picture of an important war industries center of America.

"The population picture is even more interesting. One fifth are Negroes, the vast majority of whom are farm or cannery workers. Nearly one-half the farmers are foreign-born Italians, many of whom subscribe to fascist publications and are organized into semi-fascist clubs, insurance and religious societies. The influence of the Catholic Church is felt in every sphere of activity. The remainder of the population is composed of Russians, substantial numbers of Jews, mostly Slavs, and a minority of native Americans occupying the principal economic and political positions.

"The large numbers of agricultural workers and national composition of the population make South Jersey an almost ideal spot for fascist propaganda and organization.

"But fascist organization develops only as a result of militant working class activities. Until the advent of the Agricultural and Cannery Workers Industrial Union last April no such struggles had yet taken place.

"At that time the workers on Seabrook Farms struck during cabbage planting season when every idle day meant hundreds of dollars to Mr. Seabrook. In 4 days they had their wages doubled to 25 and 30 cents an hour, their union recognized and their discharged leaders reinstated.

"The expected followed. The landlords and cannery owners, backed by every paper in the section, began organizing against the 'red menace.' A professional gangster was imported and deputized to break up the Seabrook union. Many arrests followed, all of which were thrown out of court through the splendid mass action of the workers.

"In the meantime the union grew to eight locals with nearly a thousand members. Other struggles were being prepared.

"But this was not enough. The organizers in South Jersey know that without enlisting the support of the small farmers, unemployed, and as many middle-class elements as possible that these elements would be drawn into strike-breaking Vigilante, K.K.K. or 'shirt' bands later on and the union probably smashed.

"So together with the organization of the union, mass meetings were held among the small farmers. United Farmer League locals were organized and unemployed groups established in the small towns. Middle-class merchants and professionals were approached with some results, especially among the Jews.

"In the latter part of June, Mr. Seabrook and his landlord friends decided that the opportune time had come to smash the union and railroad its leaders to jail. A strike was forced by a threatened wage cut in violation of the April agreement and the workers on Seabrook Farms came out 100 percent.

"The terror began. Four professional strikebreakers beat up and shot at pickets the first day. Scores of local deputies were brought in, fed corn whisky, and instructed to guard all scabs. A small Vigilante band appeared and the papers began their campaign of provocation against 'red agitators' and the 'immediate menace of revolution.'

"Dynamite was placed in the garage of union organizers preliminary to a raid and railroading of these leaders to long jail terms. By merest chance the 'plant' was discovered and the plot fell through.

"Three other strikes of agricultural workers near Glassboro broke out, called in solidarity with the Seabrook workers and for their own demands.

"Mass arrests, beatings, tear gas, and all the more violent forms of strike breaking were called in the first week of the strike. But to no avail. The workers held fast.

"Then began the attempted organization of mass fascist bands to smash the strike. Seabrook called upon all farmers to join his Vigilantes. The newspapers and local civic organizations echoed his appeal and mass meetings were called in several nearby towns.

"At the same time the United Farmers League began holding mass meetings in the territory at which strike leaders explained to the small farmers the position of the farm workers, explained that such rich farmers as Mr. Seabrook had no community of interest with the small farmers who were producing below cost of production, and appealed for relief to aid the strikers.

"Unemployed organizations in the small towns not only refused to join the Vigilantes but sent solidarity delegations to the farm to help picket. Leaflets were issued to the businessmen and professionals calling upon them for support.

"These activities not only served to limit the active band of Vigilantes to less than forty throughout the strike but forced upon the American Legion and even the Vineland branch of the K.K.K. a policy of inaction due to pressure from rank and file working-class and small-farmer members.

"Then the Brown Shirts of America, Inc., called a mass meeting in Hammonton to organize a branch. An anti-Fascist league was hurriedly organized and called upon mass support from nearby towns. Before the meeting trucks carrying 200 brown-clad men armed with revolvers and lead pipes drove into town. A street fight ensued, the meeting broke up and several of the fascist leaders arrested through mass pressure of the workers. This has been the last attempt to hold an open fascist mass meeting in South Jersey.

"Thwarted in his attempts to organize his mass terror bands, Seabrook utilized his only other alternative short of mass assassination. He caused 19 out of 20 members of the strike committee, three union organizers and most of the militant workers to be arrested and placed under high bail. Then after a tear-gas barrage, a large show of deputized forces, a call for the National Guard, and with the help of Federal Mediator Moffett, the strike was settled.

"Wages on the farm were not cut. In the cannery they were even raised but the union was seriously injured through mass lay-offs of its most militant members. The State NRA coordinator later reported that the strike had raised wages in every New Jersey cannery, largely in order to avoid organization and strikes during the busy season which was then approaching.

"The week following the Seabrook settlement basket workers in Vineland and Bridgetown went on strike. Then the unemployed of Vineland struck on ERA jobs for cash wages. Both of these movements were led by class-conscious elements.

"Failure to smash the union, plus the basket and unemployed struggles, unleashed a better organized reign of terror. A band of Vigilantes attempted to lynch Donald Henderson, his wife Elinor, and another union organizer one night. They were rescued only by the timely arrival of 25 small farmers hurriedly organized through a phone call.

"Papers announced the birth of a Vigilante band in Vineland of 300 members. 'Minute Men' groups were openly organized in every county seat with the help of the State Farm Bureau. These committees consisted of prominent landowners, cannery owners, and representatives from Chambers of Commerce, Legion Posts, reactionary farm organizations plus county law-enforcement officials.

"The purpose of these 'committees' was to register every farm worker in each county. This proceeded apace and workers with any kind of trade-union record were refused jobs. It was reported that during this period applicants for jobs in the Deerfield Packing Co. were photographed and fingerprinted!

"In Vineland a meeting of all 'civic leaders' was called to vote on a plan to arrest twenty-five known radicals for the purpose of driving them from the territory. This plan failed through the opposition of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers local which predicted street fighting if this were attempted.

"To arrest and smash this latest attack, mass meetings were called and well attended in every town where Vigilante or Minute Men groups were organized. A Workers Defense Corps, whose members possessed arms and could be easily called, was established to handle future lynch attempts. A mock trial of Mr. Seabrook and county officials in Bridgetown was attended by 600 farm workers and small farmers who unanimously voted to continue to organize and struggle for better conditions. Organizational work continued among the small farmers, and the officials were harried further by the stopping of an eviction on a foreclosed poultry plant.

"The defense campaign culminated in a broad United Front Defense Conference participated in by American Federation of Labor, Independent and Revolutionary Unions, churches, fraternal and small farmer organizations as well as individual and professional people representing more than 25,000 South Jersey residents.

"This Conference exercised a widespread and determining effect on the further open organization of Fascist antilabor bands. For the time such activities ceased.

"Efforts to stamp out the growth of militant organization again took legal channels. At the open air meeting in Vineland, held in defiance of the mayor and chief of police, eight workers were arrested, beaten and given 30-day sentences or fines.

"William O'Donnell, ex-State trooper, member of the executive board of the Vineland Legion Post and now organizer for the Vineland Unemployed and International Labor Defense was arrested and given a 6-month term in a free speech fight. The case was appealed and the sentence upheld. Eleven of the Seabrook workers were indicted on charges ranging from 'assault and battery' to 'assault with intent to kill.' These indictments were rendered in violation of the strike agreement which promised no prosecutions. At the same time the grand jury in a resolution called upon the citizens of Cumberland County to 'drive the Communists from our midst by any means.'

"As a result of these continued attacks organization work came to a standstill and several union locals and an unemployment council ceased functioning altogether. Negroes were driven from the movement by K.K.K. threats, the burning of fiery crosses and increased discrimination at the hands of relief officials.

"O'Donnell went to jail immediately after elections and began a hunger strike despite the protests of his friends. The rankness of the frame-up coming after a long series of vicious attacks resulted in the widespread feeling of indignation on the part of workers and small farmers.

"Thousands of leaflets were issued, mass meetings were held in the three principal South Jersey cities and in the country, delegations went to the Governor, the committing magistrate and county prosecutor, post cards and telephone calls harried county officials, resolutions and telegrams poured in from all sides, a petition was circulated for O'Donnell's freedom and stickers flooded the section.

"The workers were arrested for distributing leaflets but were dismissed through the extensive protest already organized. Labor unions and farm organizations throughout South Jersey were mobilized through the United Front Defense Committee elected at the recent conference. A gigantic torchlight parade of cars through seven towns and before the county jail threw the officials into a frenzy.

"By this time, the broad defense campaign had enlisted thousands of workers, small farmers, and many middle-class elements. County Prosecutor Tusso could no

longer stand the heat and sought a way out. He proposed a 48-hour truce during which time no mass defense activities should take place, and promised O'Donnell's release at the end of that period. His proposal was rejected and mass picketing of the main street in Vineland and torch light demonstrations around the City Hall were forthwith planned.

"From the defensive the workers took the offensive. They demanded the removal of the sentencing magistrate and county prosecutor and announced O'Donnell as candidate for mayor of Vineland on a workers' ticket in the spring elections.

"The pressure was too great for the authorities to longer resist and after serving but 23 days of a 6-month sentence O'Donnell was unconditionally released.

"As a result of these activities South Jersey today, despite the unprecedented break-down of capitalist economy, enjoys a greater freedom of organization and expression than it has for years. The fascists are definitely discredited in the eyes of many thousands of people and have ceased all attempts to function openly. The papers have taken a more conciliatory attitude toward militant activities. A corollary victory is expected in the nolle prosequing of the indictments against eleven Seabrook workers still held for court. O'Donnell has become the most popular working class leader in South Jersey and is today, together with other organizers, busy building new mass defense and economic organizations among the workers and small farmers.

"Although the battle has only begun in South Jersey, nevertheless, these experiences lend a sorely needed hope for anti-fascist activities in rural areas. It has been demonstrated here that the mass basis of rural fascist movements can be won over to the side of the militant working class. It has been demonstrated here that the fight against fascism assumes the form of a fight for the most elementary rights of the workers to organize, strike and picket, for freedom of speech, press, and assembly. And on this basis, through the medium of the united front, the majority of rural dwellers can be organized to fight and ultimately smash all 'shirt' Vigilante and other Fascist movements in the countryside.

"P.S.—As this article was being mimeographed news was brought that the indictments against eleven Seabrook workers on charges ranging from 'assault and battery' to 'atrocious assault with intent to kill' were all nolle prosequed through action of the International Labor Defense.

"This latest victory against the landlord clique marks another stage in the anti-Fascist fight in South Jersey. Of 54 arrests for militant activity in the last eight months only two people have served terms. One a Seabrook worker who served 4½ months and Bill O'Donnell who served less than a month. This record is unique in the history of militant activity in rural areas."

Appendix P.—The Seabrook Farm Strike of July 1934

The most serious agricultural strike in New Jersey occurred on the Seabrook Farms in Cumberland County in July 1934, about 3 months after the previous strike against this concern had been settled. During the interim period both sides had been making elaborate preparations for further labor trouble. Leif Dahl, State organizer of the United Farmers League, charged that larger farmers and cannery owners, led by Mr. Seabrook and backed by local newspapers, had begun organizing to smash the union, and had even imported and deputized a professional gangster. They operated, he contended, under the guise of combating the "Red Menace," whereas the real cause was the fear that wage rates in the area would be raised if the union survived. (See Appendix O.) The union and its sympathizers, on their part, made every effort to enlist the support of small farmers, unemployed, and middle-class elements of neighboring towns in order that, to quote Dahl, "these elements would not be drawn into strikebreaking, Vigilante, K.K.K. or 'shirt' bands later on, and the union probably smashed."

The strike, union organizers claimed, was deliberately provoked by a wage cut in violation of the April agreement, when Seabrook and his allies decided that the opportune time had come to smash the union and railroad its leaders to jail. Seabrook, on the other hand, charged that "a promise that arbitration would be carried on before action was taken, as set forth in contract with the union, was not fulfilled and the strike was called." (Bridgeton Evening News, June 30, 1934.) He laid the blame solely on Communists, who concentrated on organizing a minority of transient laborers recently added to the staff, and then spread the strike among the remaining employees by threats. Another Seabrook official charged that "constant intimidation was resorted to by foreign * * * Communist agitators from New York

City" who brought more than 100 pickets from Camden, Philadelphia, and other cities, a number of them "desperate characters, including thieves, pick-pockets and racketeers." (Idem, June 30, 1934.)

Violence followed almost immediately upon declaration of the strike. Severe measures, which the organizers branded as a "reign of terror" designed to break the strike and smash the union itself, were employed against the strikers. Four professional strikebreakers, it was claimed, beat up and shot at a picket during the first day. (Report, *Some Aspects of the Work in South Jersey*, by Lief Dahl.) As a result of the first violent crash, warrants were issued for the arrest of Constable Jack Saunders and Courtney Seabrook, son of the farm owner, on charges of assault and battery. Police were rushed to the scene from nearby Vineland, Bridgeton and Millville. (Bridgeton Evening News, June 29, 1934.)

In the beginning the local law-enforcement officers appeared to be at least neutral in their attitude to the strikers. Sheriff Brown of Cumberland County advised Seabrook that imported workers who knew of the strike beforehand would be "arrested as fast as they appeared." He announced further that he would not permit outside farmers to send help here to buy and harvest crops in the field, nor to allow professional strikebreakers to work on the Seabrook Farms. If they were imported, he stated, he "would hold the proper ones responsible for any outbreak." (Idem, June 30, 1934.)

Mr. Seabrook was highly critical of this stand. In the first of several full-page advertisements in the local Bridgeton Evening News stating his case to the public, he wrote:

"Do you know that a crisis now confronts you because of the cowardice of the law enforcement officials of this county? * * * acting like timid politicians instead of performing their sworn duty to uphold the law and defend life and property." (Idem, July 5, 1934, p. 7.)

Several arrests (including leading organizers of the union) and clashes between deputies and strikers took place during the following week, but the walk-out continued. Then both sides settled down to win public opinion through propaganda and mass meetings, to mobilize their respective sympathizers into "pressure groups" which could influence and even participate actively in the strike.

The Seabrook interests based their appeal for support from other farmers and business organizations on the fundamental argument that the strike threatened a serious loss in pay rolls and income for the community, and that higher labor costs would fall upon all concerns in agriculture and allied industries if the union were successful in winning wage increases. This appeal, according to the Bridgeton Evening News of July 3 (p. 2) was made to—

"* * * the New Jersey Farm Bureau, State Grange, Cumberland County Board of Agriculture, and the State Horticultural Society, to enlist the aid of farmers in nearby cities. It was pointed out that canning industries of Salem, Swedesboro, and Camden may also be affected by the threatened cannery strike planned for early August. Representatives of the State Farm Bureau and Grange were asked to call a conference of growers from all of the counties from Monmouth to Cape May, including Mercer, Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Salem, to form in a movement to prevent the strike from spreading through this important tomato and vegetable growing country. Local County Boards of Agriculture have pledged their support to farmers of Cumberland County."

Through the medium of full-page advertisements in the local newspapers, Seabrook emphasized to the general public the fact that the Communist Party was leading the strike. In the first of these he published a letter signed by Donald Henderson, "Acting Section Organizer for the Communist Party of the United States," inviting Seabrook to participate in a public debate. The advertisement concluded with the statement that "the SO-CALLED strike at the Seabrook Farms has been instigated solely by the Communists as AN EVENT to promote the REVOLUTION." (Idem, July 5, 1934, p. 7.)

A somewhat disguised appeal for direct action to crush the strike movement appeared in another full-page advertisement in a later issue:

"As a true American I hope that what is going on in Alabama in dealing with these Communists will not take place here at home, in New Jersey.

"Down there in that Southern State when Communist agitators began to incite strikes and disorders in the farm districts, to preach equal social relationships and mingling between the different races and to denounce all religion what happened? * * *

"Do you know that they sent International Labor Defense lawyers to Alabama to defend Negroes against charges of rape?"

"Do you know that they sent International Labor Defense lawyers here to Cumberland County?"

"As an American citizen I trust that no White Legion or any other Legion will repeat what is going on in Alabama against Communist agitators and advocates.

"Such a thing will and should be unnecessary here if these outside labor agitators are dealt with to the full extent of the law." (Idem, July 7, 1934, p. 3.)

These sentiments were echoed by an editorial entitled "The Communistic Menace" in the same newspaper 3 days later, which concluded that—

"Our people must awake to that menace and cut it down by nipping in the bud these uprisings and driving out of the country these agitators, paid and unpaid." (Idem, July 10, 1934, p. 4.)

The effectiveness of such appeals for direct action was manifested in the rapid growth of "vigilante" organizations which the union organizers termed "fascist bands." Outdoor meetings held by the Ku Klux Klan which, the local Bridgeton Evening News of July 5 stated, were "connected" with the strike, were reported by the Philadelphia Record of August 13 to be for the purpose of "terrorizing" Negro workers. "Vigilante" organizations composed of farmers and members of the American Legion were organized to drive radical labor leaders from the county.

The vigilante movement was organized within a week after the strike had broken out, by a score of leading farmers in Cumberland County who, "having seen the effect of the strike on the Seabrook Farms * * * were fearful that they may be forced to halt operations when harvest season starts in a few days." (Bridgeton Evening News, July 3, 1934.) The movement began with a mass meeting of growers held in the Upper Deerfield Fire Hall, at which both Seabrook and his attorney spoke. The audience was warned of losses to growers and business concerns in nearby towns if the strike continued, because canneries would be unable to operate. Both men suggested steps to be taken to "drive the strike agitators out of the county." (Bridgeton Evening News, July 3, 1934.) The next day a group of "Minute Men," two to a car, were reported driving from farm to farm obtaining signatures for a petition appealing to authorities to take strong measures which would end the outbreak.

A series of incidents, involving several cases of violence and arrest, culminated in a clash on July 6, 1934, between strikers and law-enforcement authorities. The "hand-to-hand battle" was finally ended with a barrage of tear gas. (New York Times, July 7, 1934.) As a result, the county sheriff deputized 27 men from the "vigilante committee" composed of neighboring farmers. (Idem, July 10, 1934.) Strikers implicated in the riot were arrested, and a round-up began of "all persons picketing on farms who had no right there." Several were charged with "vagrancy" when it was found they had come from the outside. (Bridgeton Evening News, July 7, 1934.) Governor Moore of New Jersey was reported to have refused Sheriff Brown's appeal for the National Guard, though State troopers were rushed to the scene to reinforce 27 deputized farmer-vigilantes armed with pick-axe handles. (Idem, July 9, 1934.) The Philadelphia Record of July 9, 1934, reported that Sheriff Brown was "deputizing 150 local farmers, all members of a recently organized vigilante committee, and all armed with shotguns." D. D. Jagers, Deerfield garage-man and chairman of the vigilantes, told Brown that his committee would furnish "350 additional 'shotgun deputies' if needed." (Idem.)

The strike was settled within 15 days through official intercession from Washington. John A. Moffett, Conciliator of the U. S. Department of Labor in conferences with the management and the union attorney, agreed on terms which included maintenance of the prestrike wage level, rehiring of strikers without discrimination, and establishment of a "board of adjustment" composed of five members. (Bridgeton Evening Herald, July 11, 1934.) In the course of negotiating the agreement, violence was narrowly averted. M. Horowitz and Donald Henderson, attorney and organizer, respectively, of the union, had a heated debate before a mass meeting of strikers and growers regarding acceptance of the terms. Union organizers were bitterly against the agreement because it left them out of control, the "board of adjustment" being composed of two union representatives, two growers and the Labor Conciliator. When Henderson voiced his opposition, several Deerfield farmers, according to the Bridgeton Evening Herald of July 11, "started after him with cries of 'Lynch him'." This proposal was prevented by the intercession of law officers.

The violent clash of interests brought to the surface in this strike did not end with the agreement. Local business groups announced that a "long-continued drive" would be started to "prevent Communists from interfering with organized labor."

(*Idem.*) Union organizers charged that, with the help of the State Farm Bureau, "vigilante bands" were being organized in every county seat, to consist of "prominent landowners, cannery owners, and representatives from Chambers of Commerce, Legion Posts, reactionary farm organizations plus county law enforcement officials." (Dahl, *op. cit.*)

Meanwhile, in the State capital, a Legislative Committee was appointed to conduct a "sweeping investigation" of Communist activities in New Jersey, particularly in Cumberland County in connection with the Seabrook Farms disorders. Besides establishing beyond a doubt the Communist Party leadership behind the organizing campaign in that area, the committee also brought out considerable evidence of exploitation in the form of low wages and employment of child labor. (Camden Courier, August 23, 1934.)

Appendix Q.—Employment Conditions in Tobacco Fields¹

Although some progress has been made toward the elimination of child labor and the improvement of working and living conditions on the tobacco plantations of Connecticut, much remains to be done. For the past six summers, annual inspection of most of the large plantations has been made by the Department of Labor. With the voluntary cooperation of the Connecticut Valley Shade Tobacco Growers' Association, an effort toward bettering labor standards and policies has resulted.

The first study, conducted by Commissioner Tone in 1933, disclosed such shocking exploitation of our thousands of tobacco workers that the cry for immediate action was raised. Children as young as 8, 9, and 10 years of age were found working 9 and 10 hours a day—the boys as leaf pickers and haulers in the fields and the girls as leaf girls and sewers in the sheds. With few exceptions, the scheduled working day was from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. with one hour for lunch. Many of the non-resident workers had to be transported to the fields from neighboring cities and towns, which meant that some children left their homes before 6 o'clock in the morning and did not return until after 7 in the evening. The temperature under the covering used over tobacco where the young boys worked often reached more than 100 degrees. In the shed the leaf girls and sewers were required to stand all day. The tobacco was brought into the unfloored sheds in horse-drawn wagons raising clouds of dust, thus creating a health hazard. Drinking water was provided in open pails, milk cans, washtubs, and barrels, with a dipper for common use. These containers were often found rusty. Toilet facilities consisted of privies or outhouses often located at an inconvenient if not inaccessible distance from the sheds. On one or two fields no facilities of any kind were found. In most cases the privies were dirty, smelly and insect infested.

Leaf pickers in the fields received \$1.00 and \$1.25 a day. A few plantations paid \$1.50. Leaf girls in sheds were paid 75 cents and \$1.00 a day. Sewers worked on a piecework basis and, on 14 of the 16 plantations inspected, they received 25 cents for stringing 20 pairs of tobacco leaves to each of 50 laths, handling 2,000 leaves in all. Weekly earnings of sewers ranged from \$6.75 to \$13.50. Field bosses and teamsters received \$2.00 and \$2.50 a day.

However, it was for the workers who "lived" on the plantation during the season for whom there was the gravest concern. A few company boarding houses provided fairly adequate sleeping quarters and three cooked meals a day, but these were occupied only by adult male workers; the \$6 and \$7 weekly board was prohibitive to the women and children receiving lower wages. Other large company boarding houses were loaned to a worker or his wife who in turn rented beds and supplied coffee for a dollar a week. In these, boys and girls, young men and women shared the same quarters. The management assumed no responsibility and there was no supervision of any kind. After working hours the children were left to their own devices. Often the bedding was a sack filled with corn husks or cheap, worn and dirty mattresses, used from season to season. Sheets were practically unknown and the worker supplied his own covering. In some cases the management arranged with a tenant worker in a company-owned house to rent beds. It was not unusual to find 15 or 20 people, including the family, living in these small three- and four-room houses. Barns and haylofts were converted into sleeping quarters. Overcrowding and oil lamps presented a serious fire hazard. Cooking

¹Article by Edna Purteff, Special Investigator, in *Monthly Bulletin of the Placement and Unemployment Compensation Division of the Connecticut Department of Labor and Factory Inspection*, Vol. IV, No. 6, June 1939.

facilities were rarely available to the boarder, and fresh meat, vegetables, and milk were made useless by the lack of refrigeration. Bread, crackers, jam, popcorn, and candy bars constituted the workers' daily fare. The yard pump usually served for toilet and laundry purposes and no attempt was made for the sanitary disposal of refuse and garbage.

An immediate effect of this first study was a voluntary agreement, signed by 17 of the large growers, limiting the age of employment to 14 years. Despite the growers' honest efforts to carry out this agreement, the employment of younger children continued under the local managers and field superintendents. The Department recommended that certification of age be secured. The 1938 inspection showed that only 1 of 22 plantations covered secured age certificates, although on most of the others an evident effort had been made to avoid hiring children under 14 years. Several children 13 years of age, however, were found working.

Wages were increased. Last year [1938?] the boys picking leaves in the field received from \$1.75 to \$2.25 a day on most of the plantations. The daily wage of older boys employed as haulers, dragging baskets of picked leaves to the trucks, ranged from \$2.50 to \$3.00, while the sewers in sheds were paid 33½ cents a bundle, averaging about \$2.60 a day. A 6-day week with a 9½ hour day was the schedule. On more than half of the plantations, a 57-hour week was the standard.

Some progress has been made in housing and general working conditions. Two of the worst boarding houses have been destroyed by fire. A few others were improved and placed under capable supervision. Refrigeration and cooking facilities have been installed in some. One grower provided a hot dinner for 30 cents and most of his young workers took advantage of it. The Connecticut Council of Churches in cooperation with the Connecticut Valley Shade Growers' Association has placed social workers in the fields. These young men and women live on the plantations—some in company boarding houses. A few work in the fields. They supervise living quarters, promote recreational activities and encourage competitive sports. Dances are held weekly under the direction of Father Quinlan of Saint Thomas Seminary. On some fields the old milk pail and bucket have been replaced with bubblers, and on one or two fields paper cups are provided. Portable privies were installed on one field.

However, these improvements have not by any means been general. Conditions menacing the physical and moral health of the workers still exist. Farm work, no matter how highly industrialized, is outside the jurisdiction of the State labor laws. Until legislative action is taken, granting regulatory powers to an administrative agency, it is only through the cooperation of the growers that abuses can be corrected and working and living standards in the industry raised. Looking toward this cooperation, the Department of Labor makes the following recommendations:

- "1. No children under 14 years of age shall be employed and those under 18 years must have employment certification.
- "2. No woman or minor under 18 years may be employed more than 9 hours a day and more than 48 hours a week.
- "3. A sanitary and safety code should be formulated for tobacco plantations.
- "4. Vehicles supplied to transport employees to and from work must be in safe condition and not overloaded.
- "5. Houses provided for resident workers must have adequate sanitation and protection against fire. Separate boarding houses should be provided for male and female workers who are not living with families. Each of these houses should be under the supervision of a suitable person.
- "6. In company boarding houses, all children should be served and required to purchase one hearty, cooked meal each day, with fresh milk provided for those who wish to drink it."

Appendix R.—Michigan Beet Agreement

Union Contract between Agricultural Workers Local No. 19994 of Blissfield, Mich., and the Blissfield Beet Growers Association¹

This agreement entered into this——day of June 1935 and extending until January 1st, 1936, and thereafter until superseded by a new agreement. It being understood that after January 1, 1936, either party may serve 30 days' notice (in writing) on the other party of its desire to change any or all of the following:

The Employees Agree—

1. To do all of the field work and care for the Grower's beets.
2. To thin beets from 10 to 16 inches apart and not more than one beet in a place.
3. To hoe beets clean in the rows and 4 inches on each side of each row (one hoeing).
4. To pull and top when ready for harvest, removing dirt by striking beets together at least once.
5. To pile topped beets in piles from 8 to 12 rows.
6. To accept as full payment for said work the amount shown on the schedule attached hereto, and as stated in said schedule.

The Grower Agrees—

1. To plant his beets (the elements permitting) so that the field workers can work beets for one or more Grower.
2. To keep beets cultivated clean between rows in a proper manner and give them at least one cultivation before blocking.
3. To lift the beets as soon as ready for harvest or pit.
4. To pay field workers for said work through the Company.
5. Should any Grower only want his spring work done, a special agreement must be made before work is started.
6. As nearly as possible all beets will be distributed to all workers as to equal acreage by the Company's fieldman.
7. No outside help to be employed as long as local labor is available.
8. Each worker must receive his or her check from the Company from each and every Grower he or she worked for.
9. There shall be no discrimination by the fieldman or growers as to color or creed.

SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS PER MEASURED ACRE: \$19.00

For Blocking, Thinning and ONE Hoeing\$10.00 per Acre
(One Dollar to be held back till Fall)

For Topping and Piling\$9.00 per Acre

Agricultural Workers Local		Blissfield Beet Growers
No. 19994 of Blissfield, Mich.		Association
.....	President	..... Pres.
.....	Secretary	..... Sec'y.

Appendix S.—The Associated Farmers of Minnesota¹

FARMER AND LABORER ENEMIES COMMENCE NEW SPLITTING MOVE.
Campaign to Set Allies Against Each Other.

Well Financed Leaders Openly Call for Mob Action to Stir Hatred.

(Northfield.)

W. F. Schilling, a member of Hoover's ill-fated Farm Board, and Thomas Quinn, president of the Minnesota Liberty League, teamed up here this week in a new and ambitious effort to set the farmer against the laborer and the laborer against the farmer.

Schilling lost his \$12,000-a-year job when the Republicans were defeated, while Quinn, who led the Liberty League, is Republican candidate for county attorney of Rice County.

¹From Rural Worker, January 1936.

Urges Violence: The frank purpose of the new organization, the ASSOCIATED FARMERS OF MINNESOTA, is to fight unions. Both Schilling and Quinn talked much of "farmers with axe handles." Schilling explained to a Leader representative how the organization would work.

"Supposing there was trouble in Faribault," he said. "We'd send out word to the three surrounding counties and 250 men with axe handles would be there right away."

About 175 farmers responded to Schilling's intensive publicity, which included 600 press releases and several thousand personal postal cards. The meeting started off badly when two candidates besides Schilling were nominated for chairman, but they agreed not to run after he had threatened to withdraw.

Schilling explained that he had recently returned from California where the Associated Farmers are organized. Most of the speech was given over to methods, usually violent, used by the west coast group against labor.

Quinn's approach was the same as Schilling's. Labor leaders were constantly referred to as "racketeers" while he told of the county's "arsenal" equipped with machine guns.

Schilling outlined the principles of the organization, dwelling much on "Americanism." He wore an inch-square American flag in his lapel.

Chief plank was that "we oppose strikes in any form," indicating an intent to fight all labor groups. He said that "threat of the pitchfork handle will do the job."

Collects Dues: Dues were set by Schilling at \$1 a year, which will include a newspaper which he expects to publish every two weeks. About 100 memberships and pledges were taken at the meeting. Schilling said that if he managed to organize 10 counties a State organization will be set up.

He told a Leader representative that "many persons" are making cash contributions to "help the thing along."

Some grumbling occurred when Schilling appointed a committee to select the officers of the organization. Most of the crowd had wandered away when the committee returned, about 30 remaining to approve a slate of county officials. Schilling was named president.

Distort Facts: Farmers in private conversations expressed discouragement over low farm prices and high machinery costs, blaming the trouble mostly on high profits of trusts and high salaries of corporation heads, but without other evidence at hand many were inclined to accept Schilling's distortions of wages received by labor.

¹As reported in the Minnesota Leader (official organ of the Farmer-Labor Association of Minnesota, Saint Paul), June 4, 1938 (p. 1).