BRINGING UNION TO TEXTILES

FACTORS WHICH AIDED AND IMPEDED THE PROGRESS OF UNIONISM IN THE NORTH CAROLINA TEXTILE INDUSTRY

by

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Bringing Union to Textiles

Factors Which Aided and Impeded the Progress of Unionism in the North Carolina Textile Industry

From the momentum engendered by the Cotton Mill Campaign of the 1880's to the creation of Burlington Industries in 1955 the history of cotton textiles has been one of major achievement in capitalization from meager financial resources, of erratic and then systematic integration of small, independently owned and operated family mills into the industrial and managerial complex of the world's largest textile establishments. Corresponding with the physical growth of plants and productive capacity was the steady deterioration of the original community of interest between textile operator and textile operative and the formation of the first native American proletariat. The emergence of this class and its realization of the collective power which it possessed, coupled with the relatively rapid consolidation of the textile industry, led to a repetition on Southern soil of the chronicle of the coming of age of American labor, this time in its relation to the organized capital of the Southern textile industry.

Coming upon the American economic scene relatively late, the establishment of textile unionism in North Carolina displayed many of the characteristics of earlier union organizations. In its battle for recognition and eventual

acceptance, North Carolina textile unionism passed through some of the growing pains common to all American unionizing movements. During the years 1935 to 1960 North Carolina textile labor as a viable force demonstrated its kinship to the American labor movement as in almost precisely the same instances it revealed its particularly local manifestations. It is in these two almost paradoxical facets of the personality of organized labor that the strengths and flaws of Southern textile unionism are most clearly revealed--and this revelation bodes well, and--also paradoxically--, ill at the same time for the future of organized labor in the Southland.

It is not by accident that the textile industry is selected in order to show the peculiarities of Southern labor, for in this comparatively elementary form of manufacturing the lines of conflict between the opposing forces of labor and management are most clearly and tangibly drawn. In this, the oldest form of mass manufacturing in the South, all the elements of a purely regional development (both on the part of the operator and in the realm of a burgeoning labor movement) are distinctly outlined. The factors producing the obvious delineations between opposing forces and thus the "model" for examination are manifold: the comparative age of the industry which enables it to display changing currents of development; the relative simplicity of the cotton manufacturing process; the wholly Southern character of the inception of the venture; the fact that native-born elements entirely predominated in both workers

and managerial personnel; and the final qualification that throughout its history the Southern cotton textile industry has been overwhelmingly interrelated with the other processes--economic, social, and political--of the whole of Southern life.

In order to evaluate the impact of unionism on the North Carolina textile industry a knowledge of the outstanding characteristics of both operators and operatives is of paramount importance. In addition, an appraisal of the efforts at bringing the union to North Carolina textiles in the era before 1935 adds scope and perspective to any chronicle of the developments of later decades. Such examinations of background material and, indeed, the great bulk of this study deal primarily with developments in the state of North Carolina because it is in the Tar Heel State that many of the significant mileposts of textile unionism have been erected and because it is in North Carolina that the Piedmont textile region desplays at once some of the most advanced and some of the most primitive examples of the cotton textile manufacturing processes and of the relations between management and labor.

The year 1880 is customarily and arbitrarily accepted as the birth date of the Cotton Mill Campaign, that almost evangelical effort on the part of Bourbon and merchant alike, not to re-make the desolated South in the image of the industrial North, but to bring to Dixie the blessings of a diversified economy based partially on the manufacture of the staple

agricultural product of the South and thus to rescue that unhappy region from its double handicap of soil erosion and the one-crop system. So fervent was the desire of these prophets of Southern industrialism that the often-repeated story of the Salisbury, North Carolina, minister who donated religious justifications and money-raising acumen to arouse in the inhabitants of that town a determination to establish a cotton mill was, though unusual, not out of keeping with the prevailing excitement of the times. In amazement at the zeal with which the proponents of the "New South" went about their mission it is easy to overlook the fact that there had been cotton mills in the South before the Civil War and that the presence of those ante-bellum industries, though radically altered by the events of the Cotton Mill Campaign, provided a starting point for the new effort. Less tangible influences of those early mills were their impact on their workers and the passing on of an acceptance of the custom of mill work to this new generation, thus predisposing psychological acquiescence of this new element in the Southern way of life.[1]

Notwithstanding the eagerness with which the course of industrialism was pursued by the Southern captains of

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[1] Broadus Mitchell, The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1921), p. 16.

industry, there were almost insurmountable obstacles to overcome. The ticklish business of gathering capital from a bankrupt South and an unfriendly North; the shadowy line between cooperation with creditor commission men and economic bondage to them in marketing the product of the mills; the arduous task of training an uneducated country peasantry to operate fairly complicated machinery--these were, in the beginning, the difficulties with which the South was confronted.[2] It is scarcely to be wondered at that the community (for it was, in fact, the community as a whole that built the cotton mills) failed to be troubled by such concerns of social welfare as child labor, wages and hours legislation, sanitation, and employee education and recreation when engaged in a struggle for economic survival. Furthermore, it can be understood that these issues, once raised, could easily be pushed aside for later attention or forgotten altogether.

Though there is no single determinable cause for the sudden shift to cotton manufacturing in 1880, Broadus Mitchell has postulated several immediate reasons why the Cotton Mill Campaign began when it did: the desire to continue manufacturing made necessary by the Civil War, the natural process of recovery following that war, the restoration of confidence in Southern political institutions so that non-Southern investors had no fear for the safety of their investments in Southern manufacturing ventures, the

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[2]Broadus Mitchell and George Sinclair Mitchell, <u>The Industrial Revolution in The South</u> (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1930), p. 10.

presence in the South of a quietly competent body of business and professional men who advocated liberal commercial and manufacturing policies, and the rising price of cotton believed destined to continue in large returns.[3] Add to these the return to specie payments and the rapid expansion of the network of Southern railroads in the late 1870's, and the stage was set for the Cotton Mill Campaign.[4] The International Cotton Exposition held in Atlanta in 1881 capped both the carefully planned and the natural preparations for the growth of the Southern textile industry by drawing together the spokesmen of the New South and by serving notice to the North that the South was open to investment and, as it happened, to exploitation.[5] As if in answer to the energy generated by the prophets and by the Atlanta Exposition, the number of mills advanced 48.4 per cent from 1880 to 1890 and 67.4 per cent from 1890 to 1900, the size of the mills easily growing to parallel the increase in numbers.[6]

The personnel to chart the course of the cotton textile mills was recruited from the Bourbons and then from the merchant elements of Southern society. It was at first the "big man" in the community--the lawyer, doctor, former plantation owner--who directed the industrial establishment, but he soon gave way to the merchant-turned-manufacturer, to the acquisitive sons of the storekeeper. It was this

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[3] Broadus Mitchell, _Op. Cit._, pp. 98 ff.

[4] _Ibid._, p. 74.

[5] Ibid., p. 122

[6] _Ibid._, p. 68.

newer generation of managers which began the process of withdrawing the mill and its everyday activities from the mainstream of community concern so that the mill and its workers were progressively alienated from the ongoing life of the community. From the establishment of the cotton mills for the purpose of rehabilitating the South economically and socially to the present _raison d'etre_ of the cotton industrial complex as a largely pecuniary venture needed but the passage of two or, at most, three or four generations. In time and, as it seemed, inexorably, the community-conscious founding generation gave way to the establishment of a managerial elite far removed from the level of the mill worker and, until quite recently, largely divorced from the community surrounding the mill.

At the opposite end of the hierarchy stood the mill operatives, entering the gates of the mills from their gullied, worn-out farms[7] and from the neighboring Blue Ridge Mountains[8]. The opening of the mill gates was an economic boon to these rural disinherited, and willingly and even thankfully they left the unproductive soil. Coming as he did from a life haunted by past, present, and future poverty, and with the realization that he was to perform an an essential if supporting role in the Southern industrial

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[7] Glenn Gilman, _Human Relations in the Industrial Southeast_ (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1956), p. 36.

[8] Benjamin Franklin Lemert, _The Cotton Textile Industry of the Southern Appalachian Piedmont_ (Chapel Hill; The University of North Carolina Press, 1933), p. 8.

drama, the worker was able to leave with scant regret the land he and his fathers had tilled for generations. In the mill he developed a degree of self-assurance and security, conscious of the vitality of his new function and of the significance of his status. Yet, he was (in spite of being known as "Jack" or "Tom" by the owner-manager and of being questioned with friendly, not-yet-condescending concern about his family affairs) aware that he had in some way demeaned himself by leaving the farm for the mill, feeling that others outside the mill gates realized the descent in his status.[9] Thus, this soon-to-be-forgotten man turned more and more away from the life outside the mill gates or beyond the environs of the mill village and became, in spite of his ingrained agrarian individualism, clannish.

The textile worker, however essential his role as a machine adjunct and however ardently he was courted by the original mill operators, saw or perhaps merely felt himself divorced from the life outside the mill and his existence as a "lint head" and became used to feeling that he was an inferior person. Southern shop girls and merchants who tolerated him only long enough to take his money--the goods and services for which it was exchanged were given increasingly grudgingly--confirmed and reinforced his suspicions.[10] More vital in the alienation of the worker from the mainstream of Southern society was the lack of interest in his

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[9]Gilman, Op. Cit., pp. 163f.

[10]Gilman, Op. Cit., p. 94.

situation evidenced by the leaders of the community. As the progressive hostility of the shopgirl proceeded apace with the progressive lack of interest of the civic leaders, the worker's existence as a recognizable part of Southern community life was implicitly denied.

Just as Southern society chose to forget the cotton mill worker as an entity worthy of note, so did the great body of cotton mill workers quickly quell any outward manifestations of worker unrest. Coming as they did from farms and mountain reaches devastated by the paucity of natural resources, they placed themselves, out of utter necessity, in the hands of the cotton mill operators. Those operators, out of comparable necessity, accepted the obligation for caring for the workers in the most obvious, unsophisticated, and necessary acts of paternalism ever evidenced on the American scene. That the workers repaid this paternalism with thankfulness and devotion is shown by their immediate and utter rejection (in the early period of industrial relations) of any stirrings of dissatisfaction and incipient revolt.[11]

What were the personality characteristics of this cotton mill worker that he would allow himself to be so forgotten and neglected by the community around him? Three ethnic strains were mingled in him--Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, and Teutonic--all North European in origin.[12] His religious in-

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[11]Broadus Mitchell, "A New Voice in the South," Commonweal, Vol. XI (April 30, 1930), p. 734.

[12]Gilman, Op. Cit., p. 36

heritance (whether Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Moravian, or Quaker), deeply ingrained with a stringent interpretation of the Christian or Protestant ethic, emphasized frugality, thrift, industry, and individual responsibility for his actions.[13] That this native Southern agrarian--for the original worker in the cotton mills had bred into him the intense independence of the old-line farmer--could and would allow himself to become utterly dependent upon the good will of the mill operator is an indication of the financial distress he left behind when he began his journey to the mill. Interestingly enough, this forgotten man of the South could speak and react from the depth of his involvement in the paternalistic scheme to the "foreign" elements of textile unionism in the 1930's. Indeed, it may be concluded that the worker's long dormant sense of independence may have been one of the factors which has long dogged with defeat any movement for collective action.

While the religious heritage of the Southern textile worker may have contributed to his prejudice against collective action, it almost certainly gave to him a reason for accepting his sorry financial and social lot. The fact that early textile mills were extremely erratic and unstable, stopping and returning to production almost without

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[13]Gilman, Op. Cit., p. 36.

warning, contributed to the worker's insecurity; therefore a religion which promised a glorious after-life if all the earthly ethical rules were followed allowed the worker to experience conditions which would otherwise have continually frustrated him.[14] Significantly, the worker's expectation of pie in the sky contributed to his acceptance of his meager earthly reward and accustomed him to the psychological demands of the paternalistic system. John Morland noted in his exhaustive study of a mill village that 'Mill people seem to feel that there is little they can do to change the situations that face them. Yet this need not cause undue concern; "for everything is in the hands of the Lord."'[15]

Just as the worker was caught between the expectation of absolute submersion in the early cruelties of the industrial process and the specter of having to return to the almost completely hopeless life he had left, so was his child mortgaged to the life of the mill. Much has been written about the plight of the child in the Southern textile mills, but though mill surroundings were undoubtedly unhealthy, the child was quite accustomed to hard labor on the family farm so recently vacated or on the sharecropper's plot left behind. Thus, his entry into the mill was "understood" and the sin of the mill owner in

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[14] Morland, Op. Cit., p. 236.

[15] Morland, Op. Cit., p. 234.

using child labor was as much one of omission as of commission, for he was more often than not importuned by heads of families to allow children to work in the mills.[16] The real tragedy of child labor was contained in the slim prospect of future improvement held out as much as in the unhealthy conditions of mill work. Though the story of the floor sweeper who rose through hard work and perseverance to an eventual office job was told and re-told, the possibility of its re-enactment became increasingly remote as time wore on. When the problem of child labor finally attracted the attention of civil and religious authorities roughly a quarter century after the beginning of the Cotton Mill Campaign, the employer's answer was both interesting and revealing. In his formal assertion of his role in the paternalistic system the employer translated at least to his own satisfaction what had at first been both an economic necessity and an "easy way out" into an integral part of the paternal relation between himself and his workers and, inevitably, into a positive good for both community and individual.[17]

The problem of child labor in the Southern cotton textile industry was actually solved not by legislative action but by the fact that the mills outgrew child labor. By the 1920's the rate of growth had so slowed that it was unnecessary to engage an inefficient working force simply

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[16] Gilman, Op. Cit., p. 159.

[17] Broadus Mitchell and George Sinclair Mitchell, Op. Cit., p. 11.

to man the machinery. Though wage levels had been lowered rather than raised at the end of World War I, their level was sufficient to eliminate the necessity of child employment to keep the laboring family together. Finally, more complex machinery demanded such a degree of skill that the untrained and easily exhausted child was virtually eliminated from most of the Southern cotton mills.[18]

The end of the First World War may be taken as a significant date in the history of the Southern cotton textile industry, for by this time the first generation of mill personnel had passed out of the industrial picture. The founder-operator had been replaced by the manager, and the old friendly concerned paternalism had become institutionalized into little more than a "system" for relatively peaceful industrial relations. The first mill operators by rescuing the South from its poverty-stricken agricultural system had earned the allegiance of the workers and had consolidated their primary position by means of complete paternalism.[19] It was at best a difficult task that their successors faced in following such unquestioned leaders, and in tragically numerous instances those successors either lacked or laid aside any knowledge of Southern folkways in institutionalizing the cotton textile industry.

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[18]Gilman, Op. Cit., pp. 162 f.

[19]Broadus Mitchell, "A New Voice in the South", p. 734.

Wilbur J. Cash has definitively characterized this process of change in the managerial process:

> Most of the old barons were dead or dying, and when they weren't, were usually so engrossed in golf at the country club or in the mania for speculating in land values or stocks that they had no time left for the practice of their ancient amicable habits. In the main, their shoes were filled now by their sons or successors. Many of these had been trained in the tradition of the old close personal relationship between master and man and, particularly in the smaller mills, sought to continue it, but they were commonly quite as much absorbed in the country club and speculation as their elders, and so in their turn had little time really to cultivate it. Too, the generally greater spread in their education and background made it more difficult for them to get close to the worker than it had been for their fathers.
>
> Still another thing that sometimes cut straight across the tradition was the Yankee cult of the Great Executive. Seducing the vanity especially of the young men who had been educated in the Northern business schools, and their imitators, it led them to surround themselves with flunkies and mahogany and frosted glass, with the result that the worker who had been accustomed to walking into the Old Man's office without ceremony could no longer get to them save at the cost of an effort and a servility which were foreign to his temper and tradition.
>
> These men of the new generation would by ordinary go on contributing to and supporting the mill churches and schools, might in many instances make a great show of knowing their workers by their names and occasionally forgathering with them over the soda-pop box in the company store; but they did it, in part perhaps because of growing calculation, but more for the same reason that they wore a dinner jacket in the evening: because it was something one was supposed to do in the circumstances--habitually and mechanically, but, typically speaking, without the direct interest and zeal which had belonged to the older men.
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> That is to say, the feeling which had lain at the heart of the old notion of paternalistic duty was fast dwindling, leaving only the shell--at the same time that the notion of paternalistic <u>privilege</u> was remaining as strongly entrenched as ever, and even perhaps being expanded. The new barons, to a man, held tightly to the conviction of their right to tell the worker what to do--as, for instance, how to vote in an election--though now they often

told him through understrappers rather than directly. And some of the more hard-bitten among them were beginning to resort to overt use of that power to coerce which had been the baron's all along, and to emphasize their advice by firing whoever was discovered to have flouted it.[20]

Just as the textile operators had divorced themselves from the traditional industrial relationship in all but the most superficial remains, so had the cotton mill workers become a new breed. When the first operatives had entered the mill gates, they had had an alternative to mill work--returning, if this hew way of life proved too uncongenial, to their farms. No longer was this exit open. The second and third generations of textile laborers had forgotten the practices of the farmer; they had grown up in the mill village and had turned to the loom and spindle for subsistence living. Besides, the old farm had likely passed out of family ownership either through voluntary sale or through sacrifice to pay land taxes or mortgages.

Not only were the mill workers alienated from the family farming heritage, they belonged to the generation which could expect no further territorial acquisitions to draw them away to the lands of challenge. Gold rushes, land rushes, the acquisitive aspects of Manifest Destiny had long gone. There was no land in the West to attract the mill worker. He was forced to remain in his mill village or to move to another much like the first.

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[20] Wilbur J. Cash, The Mind of the South "Vintage" paperback edition (New York: Random House, 1960), pp. 275f. (originally published by A.A. Knopf, New York, 1941).

But what of this worker who remained on mill hill? The Southern textile laborers were as a group from 97 to 99 per cent white native-born; the Slave, Italians, Poles, Irish, Germans were conspicious by their absence as was the Negro.[21] This new generation could read and was aware of the gulf separating mill hill from the smug, speculative, intensely white-collar professionalism in the towns as it was aware of the hollowness of the worn-out and used-up protestations of the new paternalism.[22] The old primitive religion of the fathers appeared to be the sole untainted remainder of the older days of cooperative venture; it was this religion with its ingrained acceptance of things as they were and its implicit admonition to remain passive that served to temper the new stirrings in the Southern textile Piedmont. Yet there were other legacies from the Cotton Mill Campaign era--the growing clannishness of the workers as they were eliminated both explicitly and implicitly from the mainstream of the Southern way of life. Another inheritance, the stories of success through perseverance and hard work, of the rise from floor sweeping to sitting on the board of directors, was no longer capable

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[21]Oliver Carlson, "The Southern Worker Organizes," The Nation, Vol. CXXXIX (September 26, 1934), p. 354.

[22]Wilbur J. Cash, "The War in the South," American Mercury, Vol. XIX (February, 1930), p. 167.

of inspiring belief and ensuring placidity. This new generation had heard the stories and had yet seen its fathers work long years and still not climb to anything like a psychologically satisfying status.

From these enumerated legacies of the old order of things and from the conditions imposed by the passage of time the cotton mill workers became the first native American proletariat. This is not to say that this description properly evaluated the underlying tensions of the Southern industrial scene on the eve of the Great Depression:

> "They're satisfied," the personnel manager had said, looking at me from his clean office, his rested body, his white collar, his trim tweeds. "Now and then one of them gets the swell-head and goes off to Detroit for big money. After a month he's broke and crawls back begging for his job. But most of our people are local people and they're satisfied."
>
> What will happen when they stop being satisfied? Some day when they open their eyes and suddenly <u>see</u> the heaps of rotten lumber they live in; the grubby food they eat; their idiots and malborn; their native stock that cannot read a newspaper or sign its own name; their miasma of religious buncombe and racial prejudices black enough to black out the sun; their bullring of meaningless days; sunrise to sunset the same drudgery, the same iron-fisted choking off of every vital impulse--for $10 to $13 a week?
>
> Already they begin to chafe. They ask questions on the sly. The strongest flare up in bitterness. "They don't pay you nothin' down here." Yes, keep the floaters and drifters out, New South! You're right: they stir up trouble. They bring comparison with them. A dangerous thing, comparison. But some day, for all your nice precautions, the New Industrial South is going to blow up. You can't put all that pressure on powder without its blowing up. However ignorant, however supine these hill-billies may seem to be, at bottom they are a strong people. They have sucked in savageness from their mountains, a burning thirst for freedom. If ever they revolt, theirs will be the bloodiest revolt in history.[23]

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[23]Paul Peters, "Cotton Mill," <u>American Mercury</u> Vol. XVII (May, 1929), p. 9.

Rather, this description depicted what Northern industrial workers and labor organizers thought and hoped would happen when the fuse to the Southern powder keg was lit. The lighting of that fuse and the extinguishing of the ensuing conflagration is a later story.

What remains to be noted about the textile worker is his physical condition, for it proved to be this single element, more than any other that spurred the revolt in the Southern Piedmont. The elements of his physical condition--housing, hours, wages, conditions of work--were the basic causes of both his leaderless and of his "foreign-led" strikes.

The early housing was provided by the mill owners. Built in "villages" or on "hills", they were usually small, dirty frame houses situated along the sides of unpaved streets where the dust and mud served to blacken the already bleak structures.[24] Paul Blanshard visited one of these dwellings:

> Gladys Caldwell invited us in. We sat by a tiny fireplace in her front room, which was also her bedroom. On the walls were a picture of Jesus and a calendar. In the room were a bed, a trunk, and a dresser; in the room opposite were a trunk and a bed; in the kitchen were a table, a bench, and an oil stove. In the four rooms there were four chairs. The house had no plaster, no rugs, no heating stove.[25]

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[24] William Hays Simpson, Southern Textile Communities (Durham, North Carolina: American Cotton Manufacturers Association (?)), p. 26.

[25] Paul Blanshard, "How to Live on Forty-six Cents a Day," The Nation Vol. CXXVIII (April 30, 1929), p. 580.

The condition of this house and its furnishings was all too common in the years immediately preceding the Great Depression.

As to the matter of wages and hours, the old low wages and long hours were far too commonly compounded in the decade of the 'twenties by the application of the stretch-out system, a plan of increasing the work load of each operative designed to increase production without comparable increases in the costs of production. This condition was pathetically prevalent:

> "My husband and I go to the mill at seven. He's a stripper in the cardin' room and gets $12.85 a week, but that's partly because they don't let him work Saturday mornin'. They put this stretch-out system on him shore enough. You know he's runnin' four jobs ever since they put this stretch-out system on him and he ain't gettin' any more than he used to get for one. Where'd they put the other three men? Why they laid 'em off and they give him the same $12.85 he got before."[26]

Complicating and further delineating the plight of the Southern textile worker were the facts of child labor, the 55 or 60-hour work week, night work for women, and the North-South wage differential which in 1927 made the textile wages in the five leading New England textile states 47.8 per cent higher than the prevailing rate in the five leading Southern textile producing states.[27]

Add to this the blatant commercialism of the Second Cotton Mill Campaign in the 1920's and the smoldering

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[26] Blanshard, Loc. Cit.

[27] Broadus Mitchell and George Sinclair Mitchell, Op. Cit., pp. 12f.

materials of worker unrest needed only a suggestion of solidarity to produce revolt. The Second Cotton Mill Cmapaign differed markedly from the original model of the 1880's in its suppositions about the textile labor force: whereas a certain community of interest between operator and operative could be said to exist in the earlier period, the worker was now treated as a commodity to be traded upon in a deal--he took on "statistical significance" as a unit of labor only.[28] In other aspects of its energetic advertising campaign, the Second Cotton Mill Campaign took on inklings of Babbittry which exhibited its ultimately pecuniary aims: high-pressure salesmanship and offers of tax reductions or exemptions to Northern capital.[29] The workers saw these inducements offered to outsiders and then saw themselves saddled with the stigma of mill hills, their loss of status in the community outside, their pitifully inadequate wages and exhaustingly demanding working hours, the stretch-out system, their exclusion from the original operator-operative partnership. And they were willing to be docile no longer.

The labor union had been the answer for labor discontent in other sections of the American industrial complex, but it had failed to make much headway in the

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[28]Gilman, Op. Cit., p. 192.

[29]Harriet Laura Herring, Southern Industry and Regional Development (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1940), p. 3.

South. In the decade of the 'twenties, workers could remember infrequent and erratic Southern textile organizing campaigns which had swept great numbers of workers into the union--workers who slipped out of the fold as soon as the campaign ended but who significantly retained memories and a lingering tradition of unionism in many villages.[30]

In the pre-Depression South, however, the forces conspiring against the success of textile unionizing campaigns--the operators, the community, the economic condition of the region, and the worker himself--were sufficiently powerful to seriously hamper even the strongest labor unions. The various national textile unions were far from strong. The most important, the United Textile Workers, an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor, claimed, in 1929, 30,000 members, less than 3 per cent of the one million workers in all branches of textiles, and in the cotton textile field only 10,000 of half a million millhands were organized, all of these in the North. The United Textile Workers, as though not weak enough, was prey to the depredations of other craft unions to the right of its economic and social philosophies and to the revolutionary unions on the left, chiefly the Industrial Workers of the World (its main strength coming from memories of its activities in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and Paterson, New Jersey) and the Communist-led and oriented National

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[30]Broadus Mitchell and George Sinclair Mitchell, _Op. Cit._, p. 19.

Textile Workers Union. It was this last union which sparked the revolt among the Piedmont millhands.[31]

In mid-April, 1929, there were between seventeen and eighteen thousand millhands out on strike in North Carolina and Tennessee. The three largest revolts were at Marion and Gastonia in North Carolina and Elizabethton, Tennessee. The Communist-oriented National Textile Workers Union fomented the Gastonia strike; the United Textile Workers led those in Marion and Elizabethton. In addition there were widespread "leaderless" strikes all across the South Carolina textile Piedmont which were notable for the positive sentiment they engendered "off" the mill hills precisely because of their spontaneous natures.[32]

The strike at Gastonia in the spring and summer of 1929 is remembered by loyal Russian Communists alongside the Potemkin riots.[33] What began as a protest against wage cuts, the introduction of the stretch-out system, extensive piece work and the replacement of high wage with low wage laborers ended relatively soon in the duration of the disturbance when mob violence and civil repression ended the strike as a strike. Following the end of the

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[31] Irving Bernstein, The Lean Years; A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), pp. 11f.

[32] Broadus Mitchell and George Sinclair Mitchell, Op. Cit., p. 16.

[33] A conversation with Mr. Jordan Kurland, who was a visiting professor at the University of Moscow during the academic year 1959-1960. Mr. Kurland was congratulated upon the Gastonia affair while in Moscow.

actual strike (After the company manager of the Loray Mill peremptorily rejected the economic demands of the strikers, political issues gained paramount importance and the strike *per se* was over.), the chronicle of violence on both sides of the political and economic fence made the Piedmont North Carolina town a battleground of conflicting ideologies. Eventually the Communist-led National Textile Workers Union was discredited and the Gastonia representatives of that union were convicted in a sensational trial for the alleged murder of the Gastonia chief of police. It boded ill for the future of congenial government-labor relations that one of the prosecution attorneys was Clyde R. Hoey, later Governor and United States Senator from North Carolina.[34]

Neither the American Federation of Labor nor the United Textile Workers had displayed any sympathy for the Gastonia revolt, but that revolt and its political aftermath reviewed a lesson: that though the sympathy of the community might be aroused for the mill workers (as in the "leaderless" strikes in South Carolina), any hint of political and of social radicalism or any union demands for racial equality[35] would immediately ignite drastic community repudiation of the worker's aims and lead to eventual com-

[34]Bernstein, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 20fff.

[35]The National Textile Workers had demanded racial equality in the Loray mill, which had employed only two Negro workers out of 3200 employees--and these two Negores had fled the mill at the first notice of impending strike. (Bernstein, *Op. Cit.*, p. 33.)

munity action on the side of repression to underline that repudiation. Such lessons as that of Gastonia could serve only to reinforce the conviction of the American Federation of Labor that it should pursue exclusively the economic aims of higher wages, shortened working hours, and improved conditions of work. Further, the Gastonia experience heartened those conservative factions of the organized labor movement who now spoke openly of the community of interest between conservative labor and the businessman and who sought to legitematize the American Federation of Labor and its affiliates as compared with the more radical fringes of the labor movement.

The strikes at the Baldwin and Clinchfield Mills in Marion actually were ignited in April, 1929, by the fires of the "leaderless" revolts, and the course of the strike and the court action which followed it lasted until nearly Christmastime. The strikes--or the strike, since both Baldwin and Clinchfield were under the same management -- were characterized by noticeable solidarity of the striking force, solidarity made all the more difficult to maintain because of the use of civil authorities and legal machinations on the side of the employer. Arbitrary dismissal of union members, the coercion of strikers by local clergy and church boards, calling in of credit by local merchants, and attempted mediation by a disinterested textile manufacturer and banker were features of the strike. The United Textile Workers and the American Federation of

Labor aided little in financing and organizing the strike, and it was over the protest of the UTW representative in the area that the strike call was sounded in the first place.[36] Against such heavy odds it is not surprising that the strike failed miserably to ameliorate those conditions against which the workers revolted. What was significant for the course of textile unionism was the indication that the lines of conflict had been clearly drawn: the workers were almost entirely on their own--they could expect little sympathy from townspeople and none from mill managers. Even their churches deserted them. And the labor union aided little in their struggle for a more equitable return for their work. On the other hand, the solidarity of the millhands against their mountainous opposition was indeed magnificent, for the lint heads did not retreat from the picket lines until fired upon and did not give up the strike until it was absolutely liquidated.

The reasons for the defeat of the Piedmont millhands were evident everywhere--in the inability or unwillingness of the mill operator to reach any compromise with the union; in the psyche of the worker: his traditional acquiescence in paternalism, his suspicion of Northerners and radicals, his ingrained individualism which hampered collective action; in the inattentive and then incensed community; in the

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[36] Bernstein, Op. Cit., pp. 29fff.

blatant radicalism of the National Textile Workers Union and the halfheartedness of the United Textile Workers. Yet the revolt of the Piedmont millhands did arouse the American Federation of Labor to endorse at least a token union organizing campaign in 1929.[37] Though the 1930 organizing drive of the United Textile Workers (through which the AFL-endorsed drive was carried out) was patently a failure in winning recognition for the union, the experience of organizing would not die out and be lost on later generations of textile workers.

More positively, Gaston County (home of Gastonia) textile mills decreased hours of work with no comparable reduction in wages; at Marion hours were shortened, wages increased, and welfare benefits liberalized. And in 1930 the Cotton Textile Institute voted to abolish night work for women and minors under the age of eighteen.[38] Intangible benefits accrued, too: sensitive Southerners had been distressed by the specter of bloody revolt and repression and this shock aroused religious organizations, educational bodies, and civic groups at least to question the heretofore untouchable and unalterable power of the mill owner and every manifestation of the paternalistic system.

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[37] Bernstein, Op. Cit., p. 34.

[38] Ibid., p. 42.

By the end of the 'twenties the plight of the industrial South and of the millhand in particular was indeed desperate:

> The Piedmont on the eve of the Great Depression was a microcosm of all America in the somber decade to follow. On this beautiful and tragic land...the millhands' revolt put in relief the great labor issues that were to absorb the entire nation in the thirties. Here were the problems of economic collapse--of poverty, of unemployment, of relief. Here, too, were the questions of labor standards--of low wages, of long hours, of night work for women and children, of factory sanitation and company housing, of workmen's compensation. Here, as well, were the fundamental issues of collective bargaining--of the right to organize and bargain, of discrimination for union membership or activity, of the company union, of the labor injunction, of the right to strike and conduct strikes, of the appropriate role of the government in labor disputes. Here also were the chronic problems of the American labor movement--of its weakness, internal division and drift, of the deep-seated reluctance of craft unions to sponsor industrial organization, of rival unionism, of Communism. Here was the painful problem of the rigidity of the American employer....Here was violence, the extraordinary American tradition of solving disputes with guns instead of words.[39]

Periodically the American Federation of Labor attempted to plant textile unions in the South during the decade of the 'thirties. The first such attempt in 1934-1935 produced a general strike, and employer-sponsored opposition to unionism flared into open terrorism, the use of the militia, eviction from mill villages, and actual violence.[40] In 1939, another general organizing campaign was attempted by the remains of the United

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[39] Bernstein, Op. Cit., pp. 42f.

[40] Stetson Kennedy, Southern Exposure (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1946), p. 292.

Textile Workers left after the exodus of large segments of that union out of the American Federation of Labor and into the Committee for Industrial Organization.[41] In his call for the Atlanta conference to organize such a Southern drive, President William Green of the AFL asserted that the chief objective would be the textile industry and that this, the "widest organizational campaign ever conducted in the South" would proceed in the organizational drive without regard for the activities of the Committee for Industrial Organization since that body had done little of last importance in Dixie.[42] The AFL approach centered on affirmations of a community of interest between businessmen and labor, of the efficacy of state legislative action as opposed to federal governmental action, and of the "business-oriented" psychology of the worker as opposed to his class consciousness.[43]

The really significant movement for Southern textile organizing campaigns came under the aegis of the Textile Workers Organizing Committee of the Committee for Industrial Organization which in 1935 garnered the affiliation of the United Textile Workers and, in 1939, a majority of the UTW locals and became the Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA-CIO), while other UTW locals reaffiliated

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[41] New York Times , January 23, 1939, p. 3.

[42] Ibid., February 7, 1939, p. 15.

[43] Ibid., March 3, 1940, p. 39.

with the American Federation of Labor and formed again the United Textile Workers of America (UTW-AFL).[44] John L. Lewis, chairman of the Committee for Industrial Organization, explained the objectives of the 1937 Southern drive of the YWOC as being "collective bargaining, the right to organize, the privilege of being Americans."[45] In order to avoid being tagged with the epithets "nigger lover" or "atheistic Communist", the TWOC sought to use field representatives who spoke the same language with the same regional inflections of the mill workers.[46] However, most of the gains of the 1937-1938 organizing campaign were made during the drives begun during the first six months of the campaign, for the 1937-1938 depression made any further attempts at organizing activity both impractical and unwise from financial and psychological standpoints.[47]

Complicating the CIO Southern textile drive of 1937-1938 was the dissension in North Carolina which led to the ousting of Roy R. Lawrence, the Carolinas administrator for the TWOC from the presidency of the North Carolina Federation of Labor. Allegedly, Mr. Lawrence had

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[44]Bernard Yabroff and Ann J. Herlihy, "History of Work Stoppages in the Textile Industries," Monthly Labor Review, Vol. 76 (April, 1953), p. 368.

[45]New York Times, March 10, 1937, p. 3.

[46]News Week, Vol. IX (May 10, 1937), p. 7.

[47]John W. Kennedy, A History of the Textile Workers Union of America (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Economics, University of North Carolina, 1950), p. 81.

committed treason by holding office in both the CIO and the State Federation of Labor, an AFL affiliate.[48] Such internecine warfare did little to advance the cause of organized labor. In fact, the in-fighting did not end in 1937 but recurred in 1952 when the ranks of the TWUA in North Carolina were thinned as several thousand workers re-affiliated with the UTW-AFL, this time against the actions of the officialdom of the TWUA on the national level.[49] Both incidents did little to answer those attackers who criticized the internal division of the labor movement in their efforts to discredit unionism. In addition, the divisive factors within the body of organized labor could not have been other than confusing and disheartening for those millhands who, just "discovering" unionism, and seeing in it the leadership to move them from economic and social oblivion, saw those who were to be their leaders engaged in trying to kill other labor ordanizations.

In spite of the damage done the Southern organizing drive by the 1937-1938 depression, the TWOC report at the 1939 TWUA convention was optimistic. The report claimed for TWOC 27 contracts covering 27,000 workers below the Mason-Dixon line, the winning of sixty National Labor Relaions Board elections covering 40,000

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[48]New York Times, May 17, 1937, p. 13.

[49]Ibid., May 19, 1952, p. 24.

Southern workers, and the signatures of 85,000 Southern textile workers on pledge cards. Even more optimistically the report continued:

> Cotton textile employers are loosening their hold on politics, church, thought, and life in the South. In place of the cotton "feudal system" slowly the new liberal South is building genuine democracy founded on a recognition of the rights of workers. The union is proud to share in their work.[50]

There were those who questioned the ease of organizing the South, though, Some noted the cost of organizing activities and the great number of Southern textile installations. Another difficulty would be found in the purely financial aspect of union dues: would the textile workers now under the new umbrella of federal wage and hours legislation, earning more money than ever before, figure that he needed to pay union dues?[51] The first question was answered piece-meal: the Southern field was expensive to organize and TWUA tactics had to be changed from time to time to deal with this problem. Other factors were of more importance than mere pecuniary import in the answer to the second question of the sceptics.

During the years of World War II textile unionizing activities as such were not the issues for debate that the question of government-imposed minimum wages turned out to be. In 1941 the United States Supreme Court upheld the

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[50] New York Times, May 15, 1939, p. 32.

[51] Business Week, May 20, 1939, p. 30.

validity of the minimum wage for cotton textile workers, both North and South in a case dealing in its larger implications with the concept of federal governmental establishment of minimum wages for industrial workers.[52] During the war years, the War Labor Board was active in increasing the wages of textile workers and in holding out the hope of eliminating the North-South differential, actions which produced sharp cries of favoritism to Northern textile interests and to organized labor from Major L.P. McLendon, an attorney for large North Carolina textile manufacturing interests.[53] Even the New York Times got into the fracas with an editorial condemning "inflationary" wage increases.[54] Though the War Labor Board did not eliminate the North-South differential,[55] it did, in 1945, grant a 55-cents an hour minimum wage to all textile workers, both North and South.[56] Immediately, the TWUA, which had lobbied for a 76-cents per hour minimum in 1944-1945, released its members from its war-time

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[52] New York Times, February 4, 1941, p. 1.

[53] Ibid., August 6, 1942, p. 9.

[54] Ibid., August 8, 1942, p. 10.

[55] Ibid., August 15, 1942, p. 26.

[56] Ibid., February 21, 1945, p. 1.

no-strike pledge entered into on December 21, 1941, charging that the War Labor Board was guilty of partiality and had been subjected to political pressures which it had failed to withstand.[57] Though union organizing activities had not made headlines during the war years, the TWUA reported that the Southern textile wage had increased 106 per cent between 1941 and 1945, this increase due to the pressure of wartime labor shortages, to the actions of the War Labor Board, and to tremendous wartime textile profits.[58]

As soon as V-J Day had come and gone, the AFL and the CIO again turned to the South, again in opposition to each other and to the textile barons of the Piedmont. President William Green of the American Federation of Labor was first to announce the Southern drive, making it clear that the AFL would base its campaign in competition with the CIO on the issue of Communism versus Americanism and declaring that the Southern millhands would be told that they had a choice between "a foreign controlled organization and an American organization. That is the issue that will be drawn in the South. It will be drawn not so much by us but by those who would deceive and betray the workers in the South."[59] Green continued to pledge "an aggressive, militant, uncompromising organization campaign. It does not matter whether we are opposed by groups of employers

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[57] New York Times, February 21, 1945.

[58] Ibid., April 23, 1946, p. 23.

[59] Ibid., April 30, 1946.

or by the rebel, rival union. We are going to ride rough-shod over them and never stop till we succeed in organizing the unorganized in the South."[60] Van A. Bittner, the director of the CIO's Southern organizing campaign, retorted, "Let Green roar and the CIO will organize."[61]

On June 15, 1946, the CIO launched Operation Dixie, throwing 252 field representatives of the CIO and numerous organizers of other national unions in the Congress into the Southern drive.[62] The textile industry in the South was to be of major concern in Operation Dixie, and the TWUA sent its own organizers into the field and pledged $125,000 to the general CIO drive in an attempt to raise the number pf unionized workers in the Southern textile industry above the 20 per cent level.[63]

The obstacles faced by Operation Dixie in the textile industry were numerous and of long-standing strength. Subsequent drives of less inclusive character (solely within the textile industry) sought also to break the back of Southern opposition to unionization. In 1953 the UTW

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[60] New York Times, April 30, 1946, p. 15.

[61] Loc. Cit.

[62] John W. Kennedy, Op. Cit., p. 124.

[63] New York Times, April 23, 1946, p. 23.

threw squads of organizers into the nine areas and then two years later shifted tactics and sent seventy organizers into an unsuccessful attempt to crack the anti-union ban in the Pepperell, Cannon, and Burlington chains.[64] In 1956, the united AFL-CIO authorized, in spite of bitterness between the UTW and the TWUA, stemming in part from the 1952 dispute already mentioned, a new textile drive to be undertaken by the Textile Workers Union of America against the Cannon, Burlington, and Pepperell chains.[65] By 1959 the TWUA (AFL-CIO) now merged, had been relegated to the unfortunate position of making demands for wage increases for union workers after the large unorganized plants had announced wage increases. On December 1, 1958, 65 union organizers stood outside the North Carolina plants of the J.P. Stevens Company, Burlington Industries, and Cannon Mills, passed out union leaflets, and after this one activity claimed credit for wage increases when they were announced.[66]

The reasons for the partial failure of textile unionism in the South (only a partial failure because many of the largest plants were unionized, notably Cone Mills, Erwin Cotton Mills, and the Marshall Field Company[67]) are manifold. Many of those failures are to be

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[64] "End of Textile Unionism?" Fortune, Vol. 56 (December, 1957), p. 232.

[65] New York Times, July 11, 1956.

[66] "Textile Stratagems", Fortune, Vol. 59 (April, 1959), p. 202

[67] John W. Kennedy, Op. Cit., pp. 116f.

found. The reasons for them are varied. The emphasis placed on racial equality positively by the unions and negatively by those who sought to destroy unionism were hurtful to labor organization. The resistance of some employers to any dimunition in their power minimized the chances for union organizing successes. In the failure of organized religion to deal creatively with an evolving social scheme, in civil and governmental repression, and in the hostility of some segments of the daily press toward union activities the seeds of union defeat were sown.

What Hamilton Basso wrote in 1934 about race relations in Southern industry had lost some of its truth through the passage of years, but his analysis still, in its major emphases, was an accurate accounting of some of the problems which the labor unions faced:

> It will be a long time before the average Southern white worker joins a movement he considers "nigger." It is only proper to realize, harsh though the realization may be, that the ordinary Southern worker belongs to a class that distrusts and frequently hates the Negro. The fact that the Negro is an economic competitor has something to do with it, but it resolves itself, ultimately, into a question of identity. The white worker in the South does not represent, as he does in the North, the proletariat. There is yet one class beneath him--a class which permits him to think of himself as a superior person, politically and ethnologically, a member of an upper class possessed of certain privileges and attainments. The Negro gives him somebody to look down upon, occasionally to abuse, frequently to despise. It is not a point of view he can abandon in a moment--or one he would be willing to abandon if he could.[68]

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[68]Hamilton Basso, "The Divided Southern Heart," The New Republic, Vol. LXXVIII (May 9, 1934), p. 362.

Politicians catered to the poor white's abhorrence of the Negro to win votes. Senator Ellison D. Smith (Cotton Ed), (Democrat-South Carolina), in a radio address warned that if the CIO were successful in its activities, the time would come when Southern white workers would be placed alongside Negroes at the cotton looms.[69]

Some employers charged the CIO with being a "nigger union" and sponsored sermons and anti-union newspaper advertising campaigns; a few even went to the length of indirectly purchasing the CIO pamphlets "The CIO and the Negro Worker" and "Working and Fighting Together Regardless of Race, Color, Creed, or National Origin" and distributed them among white workers in the hope of making those workers impervious to union platforms and promises.[70] Southern Negroes were aware of these machinations, too, but they also realized the potentialities of non-discriminatory unions. As a African Methodist Episcopal bishop perhaps too optimistically stated the reaction:

> "When I first heard of the CIO, I asked "What does it stand for?" The answer I got was, "White and colored in the same union." When I heard that, I put on my war boots and my preachin' coat, and I been preachin' the principles of CIOism ever since!"[71]

Nevertheless, racial discrimination had become institutionalized, for the legal necessity of providing

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[69] Turner Catledge in The New York Times, August 23, 1938, p. 5.

[70] Stetson Kennedy, Op. Cit., p. 304.

[71] Loc. Cit.

separate accomodations for Negro and white workers in the textile mills would have imposed extra financial burdens on mill management, and the exclusion of Negroes from skilled jobs in the industry prior to the New Deal period permanently, it seemed, allowed the white worker to preempt the most desirable positions in the mills.[72] However, both Negro and white workers were admitted to some TWUA locals in equal terms except in such cases where each race provided enough workers to warrant establishing two separate union locals as was the case in the Marshall Field mills.[73] Thus, even when the union did come into a plant, it could happen that the presence of the union served to strengthen the existing bonds of racial discrimination.

Employer opposition to unionization in the Southern textile industry seemed in many instances to have been copied exactly from earlier union-busting techniques used in the North in the first decades of the twentieth century. In the Southland, in addition, the hostile employer could throw the race issue into the lap of his workers; he did--with a four-page illustrated leaflet featuring a picture of the daughter of John L. Lewis posing between two Negroes, the picture bearing the caption "Don't Let This Happen to You or Your Family" and "Don't Let Your

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[72] Herbert R. Northrup, Organized Labor and the Negro (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), p. 119.

[73] Northrup, Op. Cit., p. 120.

WIFE or DAUGHTER or SISTER be found in the position of the woman in the picture above--Defeat the CIO."[74]

In the era of the 1930's Southern employers allowed the formation of "Friendship Associations" and "Good-Will Clubs", thinly disguised company unions. Overseers or second hands passed around petitions for the formation of such bodies, and union authorities accused the textile plant managers of discharging or evicting from company houses those workers who insisted upon entering the "real" unions. In some cases, the management of textile mills did not bother to deny that it had instigated the formation of Friendship Associations but insisted boldly that such activities did not in their intent violate the injunction against such employer interference contained in the Wagner Act.[75]

Burlington and Cannon Mills workers were especially unresponsive to union appeals. Emil Rieve, President of the TWUA answered when questioned about this lack of enthusiasm, "We just can't get the people." One of the factors making for this condition was the practice of both firms of shifting production from a mill under union organizing attack to numerous other plants, in some cases even closing down the threatened plants.[76]

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[74] John C. Cort, "Unions in the South," Commonweal, Vol. 53 (February 2, 1951), p. 424.

[75] Louis Stark in the New York Times, November 24, 1935, Section 2, p. 2.

[76] John W. Kennedy, Op. Cit., p. 27.

In testimony before a subcommittee of the United States Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee, Rieve presented the following list of employers' methods of suppressing unionism in the South:

> Surveillance of organizers and union adherents; propaganda through rumors, letters, news stories, advertisements, speeches to the employees; denial of free speech and assembly to the union; organization of the whole community for anti-union activity; labor espionage; discharge of union aympathizers; violence and gunplay; injunctions; the closing or moving of the mill; endless litigation before the National Labor Relations Board and the courts, etc.
> If all this fails, the employer will try to stall, in slow succession, first the election, then the certification of the union, and finally the negotiation of a contract. Few organizing campaigns survive this type of onslaught.[77]

In many instances the textile manufacturer used the press to his own advantage through having complimentary explanations of their "concern" for their workers spread across Sunday feature sections.[78] Other "fringe" papers appeared earlier, notably Militant Truth which was significantly sent to mill workers "with the compliments of A Friend" on the eve of many National Labor Relations Board elections with the address of the worker noted in precisely the same way as on mail addressed to him by the company.[79] Another example of the "fringe" anti-union newssheet was Progressive Labor which was sent out from

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[77] New York Times, March 5, 1951, pp. 1 and 18.

[78] An example of this was Chester S. Davis's feature article, "Kannapolis: A Kingdom of the Cannons," Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel, August 16, 1959, Section C, p. 1.

[79] Stetson Kennedy, Op. Cit., p. 232.

Knoxville, Tennessee, but was suspended during World War II after an employer was found guilty of unfair labor practices under the provisions of the Wagner Act for having Progressive Labor sent to his employees.[80] Even so established and highly regarded an organ as the Greensboro Daily News which generally included a syndicated column by Victor Riesel, the labor columnist, refused to print one of his series which contained an attack on the brutalities of Southern textile operators; the Charlotte Observer did print that particular column with an editorial underscoring its message.[81]

Neither the federal nor the Southern state governments held out any hope for the union. The passage in 1947 of the Taft-Hartley Amendment to the 1935 Wagner Act intensified the resistance of Southern industrialists to collective bargaining; a pattern of coercion, illegal firings, local injunctions against picketing, organization of anti-union citizens' committees, and protracted delays in bargaining which devastated union membership rolls developed.[82] Those employers who again and again attributed the failure of textile workers to join unions to their "native" dislike of collective action might have looked at these repressive measures and re-examined their logic.

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[80]Stetson Kennedy, Op. Cit., pp. 261f.

[81]"Textile Labor", Journal of the Textile Workers Union of America, December, 1956, p. 18.

[82]Willard Shelton, "Why Operation Dixie Failed," The Nation, Vol. 170, No. 17 (April 29, 1950), p. 391.

And those same employers who declared faith in the community of interest between operator and operative yet flocked into trade associations and simultaneously forbade their workers to organize might at least have thought up a new rationalization. So flagrant were abuses of the power of Southern employers that a Senate Labor subcommittee accused the Southern textile industry of a "widespread conspiracy" to destroy unions and charged those employers with having used the Taft-Hartley Act for "union-busting" activities.[83] Finally, in 1956, Boyd Payton (who was to come into public notice in the later Harriet-Henderson debacle) led a group of twenty-one picketers on a march outside the Washington offices of the National Labor Relations Board, charging the Board with failure to protect workers who had been discharged for union activities in the South.[84] Secretary of Labor James P. Mitchell pledged at that time an investigation of those conditions which caused Payton's complaint.[85]

Local officialdom was in many cases patently guilty of labor union suppression. In Statesville, North Carolina, where the Textile Workers Union of America had opened an organizing drive, the city council passed an ordinance requiring that persons who would solicit paid memberships in

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[83] New York Times, April 27, 1952, p. 52.

[84] Ibid., October 24, 1956.

[85] Ibid., October 25, 1956.

clubs, associations, or unions must be registered, must obtain a license and be fingerprinted, must furnish proof of no prior convictions for felony, and must present two references from local residents in order to obtain a license. Each day's refusal to comply with the stipulated procedures constituted a separate offense punishable by a fine of $50 and/or a thirty-day jail sentence. Two other localities, Taylorsville and Alexander County, wrote similar measures into their statute books, and Lexington would have followed suit had it not been for the presence of a strong labor contingent at the city council meeting when the proposed action was discussed.[86]

An examination of some of the policies of four major North Carolina textile firms (Chatham, Cone, Burlington Industries, Cannon Mills) is illustrative to some degree of varying patterns of union suppression or acceptance. Chatham and Cannon Mills both practice a high degree of paternalism; the paternalism in Burlington Industries is not so much the issue as are its practices of moving mills under union attack and of announcing wage increases to exactly correspond with the launching of union organizing drives; The Cone Mills Corporation, originally a highly paternalistic enterprise, has accepted unionization of its working force.

The management of Chatham Mills has been in the

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[86]"Textile Labor," June, 1960, p. 19.

Chatham family for four generations. The workers, chiefly from Surry, Yadkin, and Wilkes Counties are of the same racial stock, are native born, and are typical products of the North Carolina hill country. Thurmond Chatham is said to be proud of the great degree of communication between the company management and the workers and seeks to keep it that way with hospital and medical care insurance, a company retirement plan supplementing Social Security benefits, a group indurance scheme, a full-time inter-departmental recreation plan, a company paper, paid vacations, a credit union operated by employees, and a group insurance plan. Chatham has donated the Gilvin Roth YMCA as a gift to the community and has been instrumental in constructing a community hospital.[87]

These gifts of Chatham and others in the same vein prompted the Textile Workers Union of America to charge that the Chatham family through its handsome donations controls the churches in Elkin, that it controls the hospital and has veto power over who can practice in it, that the only library in Elkin is on mill property, in the Gilvin Roth YMCA, that his "man" operated the community newspaper, and that the Elkin police force is also hired to guard the mill property.[88] In 1951 when TWUA organizers wished to hold a public meeting for the Chatham workers, the only available

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[87]Chester S. Davis, "Design for Industrial Living: Chatham at Elkin," Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel, May 30, 1948, Section III, p. 1.

[88]"Textile Labor," December, 1956, p. 3.

meeting place was the auditorium in the school in Austin fifteen miles away; the use of that auditorium was later denied the TWUA because the Chatham family contributed to the school lunch program, and the Austin principal felt that he was forced to make a choice between the TWUA and his pupils' wellbeing, a choice which inevitable favored the Chathams.[89] Further, in 1954, when an National Labor Relations Board election was being held in Elkin to determine representation for the Chatham workers, the company tactics of repression had the spoken blessing of the mayor, the banker, the professional perople, and the merchants (who abruptly cut off credit and called in loans).[90] A minister, the Rev. George D. Heaton, was imported from Charlotte to supplement the local clergy in their broadcasting attacks on unionism, and in holding "prayer meetings" on company time on election eve during the course of which the union was denounced as "anti-Christ".[91] Needless to say, the TWUA petitioned the National Labor Relations Board to disregard the results of the election which went against the union (1,730 to 1, 189).[92]

The example of Kannapolis, the "largest unincorporated town in the world", and kept that was precisely because this

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[89]"Textile Labor," February, 1961, p. 5.

[90]*Ibid*., December, 1956, p. 4.

[91]*Ibid*., December, 1956, p. 5.

[92]*Ibid*., April, 1955, p. 20.

fact of unincorporation with its trappings of utter dependence for utilities and police protection upon the Cannon family makes the town easily manageable, is equally as illustrative of paternalism as is Elkin. The bulk of police department salaries is paid by Cannon Mills, and a majority of the police officers live in houses owned by the mills. There are no city taxes; so water and sewer systems, electricity, and the public recreation system are provided by the Cannon Mills Corporation. Further, Charles A. Cannon was until very recently chairman of the board of the Cabarrus Bank and chairman of the hospital board, and his son-in-law was principal stockholder in the town's only newspaper which is housed in a Cannon-owned building. Cannon is the undoubted boss of Cabarrus County politics, though there is quiet resentment of the power he possesses.[93]

In 1951 when the TWUA tried to use the Kannapolis radio station WGTL which is controlled by a member-by-marriage of the Cannon clan its request was first refused and then when the Federal Communications Commission after TWUA petitioning opened the station for its use, the TWUA was required to submit taped programs which were so altered by the station management that the union was, in effect, choked off the air.[94] So firm was the Cannon grip on its mills that the TWUA after preparing for elections in five plants in the chain in the spring of 1958 withdrew in all five cases

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93Chester S. Davis, "Kannapolis: A Kingdom of the Cannons," Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel, August 16, 1959, Section C, p. 1.

94"Textile Labor," February, 1961, p. 5.

because it feared that if it failed to win all five elections those plants which favored the union might be closed.[95]

The pattern of Burlington Industries in opposition to union penetration has been confined largely to threats of closing down plants if the union moves in. Such threats as "If the union comes in here we will move to Nova Scotia" and "If we can't dye goods cheap down here we will move to Japan"[96] are not idle ones; Burlington is commonly known to have a lengthy history of closing down plants were the unions are formed. In addition , Burlington has at various times announced significant wage increases almost simultaneously with TWUA announcements of organizing campaigns. For the millhand who is quite naturally concerned with take-home pay it is not difficult to choose between the uncertainty and possible defeat of union organizing and the certainty of a Burlington wage increase.

Cone Mills, so far as the TWUA is concerned, has a much better record than does the neighboring Burlington Industries. In Cone Mills most of the supervisors and superintendents have worked their way up through the ranks; the road to at least some vestige of the Horatio Alger story is open.[97] Cone Mills officials, though regarded as shrewd operators by union officials, were said to be easier to deal sensibly with than any other textile group of comparable

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[95]Warner Boomberg, Jr., Joel Seidman, Victor Hoffman, "New Mambers--New Goals," The New Republic, Vol. 141 (July 6, 1959), p. 10.

[96]"Textile Labor," September, 1956, p. 10.

[97]Cone Mills Corporation, "The Story of Cone Denim,"

size in the South.[98]

One of the most tragic and unnecessary stories in the annals of Southern textile labor disputes is that of Harriet Henderson. The story is an unnecessary one because the plants had been unionized and the 1958-1959 violence broke out after an arbitration clause on the contract books since 1944 was objected to by the mill president John D. Cooper.when the contract was reviewed for renewal in 1958--for no clearly stated reason.[99] The strike was of tragic proportions because here stood a man with whom the union had dealt fairly amicably for fourteen years and had held up as a fine example of employer cooperation with the union, yet who refused to allow a fourteen-year-old arbitration clause in the new contract. The strike was tragic, too, because of the implications of pressure from other manufacturers on Cooper to disavow the union, though he denied those implications and insisted that he acted of his own volition and because he had got tired of seeing his power slip through his fingers.[100] In its broader implications the Harriet Henderson affair raised grave questions: Was this the opening wedge of the solidification of an already "hard" employer line; had union demands outstripped union capability to realize those demands; were civil authorities still to be counted in on the side of the em-

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(Greensboro, North Carolina: (no date)), p. 2.

[98]Greensboro Daily News, December 11, 1955 (no page)

[99]New York Times, February 26, 1959, p. 24.

[100]A.H. Raskin in New York Times, June 25, 1961, p. 58.

ployer? And yet there were signs of encouragement: the Harriet Henderson strikers remained firm in their determination until the hopeless picketing was finally called off; other TWUA locals responded generously with donations of food, clothing, and money for the strikers.

The actual conduct of the strike was fraught with violence on both sides. State troops and finally National Guardsmen were stationed at the mill gates and patrolled the town. Strikebreakers were brought in from surrounding towns, and a Vance County version of the Mohawk Valley Formula citizens' committee policed the town.

Efforts at mediation by both federal and state officials (including North Carolina Governor Luther H. Hodges) failed to end the strike which dragged on for two and one-half years until late May, 1961, costing thousands of dollars and the good name of Henderson as the "Friendly City".[101]

In the final analysis, it was the conviction of eight men including Boyd Payton, TWUA Southern director, of charges of conspiracy to dynamite mill installations, which brought the strike to an end. Payton and the other seven convicted men were all paroled by Governor Terry

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[101] All references to Harriet Henderson are from the New York Times, 1959-1961

[102] Douglas Cater, "Labor's Long Trial in Henderson, N.C.," Reporter, Vol. 25 (September 14, 1961), p. 37.

Sanford by August, 1961, but bitterness remained then and still remains among the families of the strikers.

In Harriet Henderson, North Carolina and the South had seen the horror of labor strife. Families had been disrupted; the business of the sleepy little town had been seriously hurt; violence had flared time and time again. The real question of the future of textile unionism in the South was at stake, for here was a long-unionized mill torn by the most elementary of labor struggles. Here again were taught the lessons which had been first explained in the Northern industrial struggles; even with the passage of time and a Southern setting they were unpalatable.

Harriet Henderson raised grave questions for the TWUA, not the least of which was the question of the future of textile unionism in the South. That question appeared ultimately to leave all hope for positive answer on the shoulders of the textile worker himself. The union had been served notice by John D. Cooper that no amicability might be expected from the employers. The attitude of the community of Henderson was reminiscent of that of other Southern communities; the Vance County Committee for Law and Order had too much in common with its relatives in Gastonia and Marion to encourage the TWUA. The attitude of the North Carolina authorities in sternly prosecuting Payton and his followers with flimsy, controversial evidence hearkened back to the days of the Gastonia trial and even to the

Haymarket Affair and the Debs case in the Pullman Strike.

After Harriet Henderson the cotton mill worker was truly the man in the center, and it was a much more complicated center than it had been in the 'twenties and 'thirties, for since the Second World War the prospect of a living wage was certain without unionism. Had the millhand been enough touched by what he had heard of unionism to choose that course instead of the easier ones of Burlington Industries' high wages and Cannon's and Chatham's "family systems". Or was the union still necessary?

Even if the union were still necessary, most of its weapons had been blunted by Taft-Hartley, and those which remained were rendered less than completely foolproof because the federal government and the state governments had long since eliminated the most glaring inequities in the physical and economic condition of the worker. Child labor was eliminated; hours and wages were regulated; unemployment compensation softened the erratic processes of the textile industry. The union had now to appeal to the psychological inferiority of the worker--and, as one wag put it, "Since TV, the union can't get the millhands out of the house after dark." Add to this union's inability to act with its former force and freedom the fact of giant textile combines that could withstand the incursions of the union in one plant simply by closing it down and shifting production to any one of dozens of others, and the fact of

wage raises in non-union plants above the level of union demands, and the tableau is virtually complete.

And still the worker was the man in the middle. The union with its hands tied by Taft-Hartley and the recalcitrance of the National Labor Relations Board on the one hand and by the visible evidences of employer strength and the memory of bitter defeats on the other, could do little to go to the worker (at least, not in the way it once had). Now, after initial moves on the part of the TWUA, the worker had to come to the union.

Thus, the future of unionism lay firmly in the hands of the textile worker who, if he were willing to forego community acceptance (How long had it been since he was really accepted off the mill hill--if he had ever been?) and to assume the burden of repudiation, could have the union--but was the union now necessary to him? The answer to the final question lies deep in the psyche of the worker. The textile operative in North Carolina has seen most of his gains come from the government--wage increases, decreases in hours of work, sanitation improvements. The Southern worker has, indeed, benefited from the unrest of his Yankee brothers which led to government intervention and regulation more than from his own attempts to ameliorate conditions. Too little for the good of unionism has the union, at least in the eyes of the Southern millhand

been responsible for his good fortune.

If the worker can look behind the facade, he may be able to resurrect unionism, but that probability becomes increasingly remote with the passage of time and with the progressively better economic condition of the worker. Neither does the worker's traditional restraint from collective action unless pushed to the wall bode well for the future of unionism.

Thus the progress of textile unionism appears to have reached an impasse in North Carolina. The reluctance of the worker to engage in collective activity and to make of himself and his fellows a true proletarian class has aided in the creation of this stalemate. In their relentless opposition to unionism, the Southern operators have minimized its chances for success. The increasing size and complexity of the textile establishments prohibits much of the old freedom of access of the union agents to all the workers of one plant, thus lessening the influence of any campaign for members. By the inability of communities to adjust to the workers' organizations as realities of Southern life, by Taft-Hartley and other governmental curbs on labor union extension, and by the seeming incapacity of the labor unions to change their tactics to relate to these other changes, the impasse in unionism is defined. Whether the barricade is to be a lasting one depends to large degree on the government, the labor union, and the millhand.

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