

his debt for providing our readers with an interesting insight into the early history of aviation in Houston.

Finally this issue also contains an interesting review of Sue Dauphin's *Houston by Stages: A History of Theatre in Houston*, written by Marilyn Rhinehart. Readers of the *Review* are familiar with Ms. Rhinehart who has contributed two articles to the journal. We often forget that Houstonians have had an interest in theatrical performances for a long time, and this interesting book serves to remind us of that fact.

Labor's Struggle for Acceptance: The Houston Worker in a Changing Society, 1900-1929*

James C. Maroney

The years 1900 to 1929 encompass a period in which Texas progressed from an overwhelmingly agricultural society to the threshold of urban industrialization. Dramatic developments in manufacturing and other business activities were accompanied by a definite trend toward employer combinations and cooperation through the medium of trade associations or other forms of mutual action. Such developments provided a powerful impetus which drove working people into union with their fellow wage earners.

The Texas State Federation of Labor, formed at the beginning of the era, quickly assumed an active role in Texas progressivism, a movement which included farmers, workers, and various components of the middle class. Union members in Houston, like their counterparts around the state, firmly believed that workingmen represented an integral part of the local scene and frequently spoke out on community issues and social questions.

During the formative years of 1900-1929, organized Texas workers chose to operate within the framework of the existing economic and social system. By accepting the values of, and in many cases becoming part of the middle class, members of the craft union establishment in Texas frequently won the acceptance and indeed respect of their colleagues in the Texas progressive coalition and of the community businessmen for whom they worked. Throughout the era, however, some employers remained inexorably opposed to organized labor, no matter how moderate its policies might be. Most notable among such employers were the despots of isolated industrial communities and the national corporations in transportation and other industries, who formed powerful employer coalitions which made labor unions appear puny by comparison. Unlike many local businessmen, "alien" corporations rarely displayed interest in establishing harmonious relations

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with trade unionists. Nevertheless, the efforts of organized labor in Texas, despite open shop movements and an inherent suspicion of labor organizations on the part of public and business elements, definitely benefited the elite fraternity of craftsmen who composed its ranks.

By electing to cooperate with, and indeed join, middle-class society the craft union establishment essentially left unskilled and semi-skilled workers to devise their own solutions. A united front of all workers, irrespective of skill-levels, race, or sex, undoubtedly would have been advantageous to the majority of working people who did not belong to the elite brotherhood of craftsmen, but the existence of two factors rendered such a working-class coalition improbable. Skilled craftsmen, jealous of their newly won status, generally viewed foreigners, working women, and other competitors with a jaundiced eye; furthermore, trade unionists, children of the Progressive era environment, displayed the prevailing middle-class prejudice against Negroes, Mexican-Americans, and other racial minorities who found assimilation into American middle-class society difficult.

Texas and the nation remained ill-disposed toward mass unionism until the 1930s, but despite continuing opposition on the part of some employers, Texas craft unionists, by following a policy of moderation and performing an active and important political role during the Progressive years, demonstrated that working people could win incorporation into the Texas community.¹

Most members of organized labor in Texas at the turn of the century firmly believed that they occupied a respected role in society and optimistically anticipated further solidification of their position.² Remarks in Max Andrew's presidential reports to the Texas State Federation of Labor in 1904 and 1905 indicate not only an acceptance of the capitalistic system, but the belief that organized labor and capital must work together for the benefit of both. Andrew, editor of a Houston labor newspaper, saw the development of

large-scale industry as inevitable due to "the evolution of the times." Given the mutual dependence of capital and labor, large employers should recognize that the existence of organized labor rationalized the market environment by promoting stable conditions and uniformity of wages. Andrew advised that a conservative policy, retaining public confidence, would always win. Already responsible for the erosion of a great deal of the prejudice against organized labor, such a policy enabled the public "to understand that labor unions are nothing but the business organizations of the labor element."³

Andrew's moderate approach won considerable community favor; not only did business and professional men sometimes offer support to organized labor but occasionally expressed the desire to become a part of the labor movement; certainly, however, the attempt by McLennan County physicians to form a union and affiliate with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) represented a conspicuous exception. Unfortunately, the AFL's conservative policy did not open membership to business and professional men or employers of labor.⁴

By the turn of the century, however, reports from Texas based organizers of the AFL demonstrated both a steady growth for organized labor and optimism for future prospects. Reports indicated considerable progress not only in cities like Houston, Galveston, Beaumont, Port Arthur, Dallas, Fort Worth, Waco, Austin, San Antonio, and El Paso, but also in smaller communities such as Cleburne, Weatherford, Hillsboro, Corsicana, Midland, Palestine, Temple, Taylor, Denison, and Greenville. According to the organizers, a vast gulf existed between conditions of organized and unorganized workers. Individual locals, after the failure of negotiations, repeatedly won concessions by the use of strikes, usually of short duration and sometimes accompanied by boycotts. Typical demands included wage adjustments, shorter hours without reduction in pay, and earlier closing hours for retail clerks. The strikes, usually limited to a particular locality, generated little opposition from the general public and, in fact, union demands sometimes won support from community groups. In several communities, the "pressure" exerted by attendance of labor council representatives at city council sessions apparently reduced action detrimental to labor's interests and, furthermore, the local businessmen's leagues began to solicit labor council support for various community projects. In addition to the formation and promotion of central trade councils and federal labor unions, formation of unions became common in numerous and varied crafts and trades. Many of these locals affiliated with appropriate national or international unions; most participated in local trade councils and the state federation. The various labor organizations typically advocated label leagues to promote the use of union-made goods. In most communities,

¹For an elaboration of this view see James C. Maroney, "Organized Labor in Texas, 1900-1929" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Houston, 1975).

²Because of the availability of sources, labor historians traditionally devoted their attention to those workers organized into large national or international unions and to instances of labor-management confrontation. Sources, such as national convention proceedings, focused on broad national topics and reflected the views of the national leadership. Recent scholars, however, have begun to show more concern with the workingman at the state and local levels, and not necessarily limited to those organized in trade unions. An attempt has been made to study the worker and his environment in order to more nearly achieve a true understanding of the workingman's role in American society. See the important collection of essays by Herbert Gutman in *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York, 1977). Also, Irwin M. Marcus, "Labor Discontent in Tioga County, Pennsylvania, 1865-1905: The Gutman Thesis, A Test Case," *Labor History*, XIV (Summer 1973), 414-422; Robert E. Ziegler, "The Limits of Power: The Amalgamated Association of Street Railway Employees in Houston, Texas 1897-1905," *ibid.*, XVIII (Winter 1977), 71-90; Ziegler, "The Workingman in Houston, Texas, 1865-1914 (Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1972); David Brody, "Labor History in the 1970s: Toward a History of the American Worker," in Michael Kammen (ed.), *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, 1980).

³*Proceedings*, Texas State Federation of Labor, 1904, p. 3; *ibid.*, 1905, p. 7.

⁴Samuel Gompers to R. C. Johnson, May 15, 1903, Samuel Gompers Letterbooks (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); hereafter cited as Gompers Letterbooks. See the works of Gutman and others cited in note 2 for further evidence of community support for labor.

harmony generally characterized relations between locals of organized black workers and the white labor establishment. Furthermore, the AFL organizers frequently commented on and applauded the success of the railroad brotherhoods, which existed outside the AFL and state federation.⁵

Firm in their belief that workingmen represented an integral part of the Texas community, union men took pride in the attainment of public office by their colleagues and frequently spoke out on community issues and social questions. Although frequently voicing opposition to the poll tax as an unreasonable assessment on working people falling due immediately after the Christmas season, labor leaders nevertheless implored all union men to qualify themselves to vote: "Organized labor cannot afford to forget even for one moment that it has two weapons for offense and defense—its purchasing power and its voting strength." Some union locals made a slight monthly increase in dues in an amount sufficient to pay the poll tax of each member by the end of the year, and refundable to every member upon presentation of a valid poll tax receipt. The state federation's president for 1907, J. H. Fricke, recommended such a plan for general use.⁶ The *Galveston Journal* praised a new law in 1907 instituting the jury wheel, designed to ensure a cross section of the community on jury panels.⁷

Union men regularly urged their colleagues to cultivate the habit of purchasing, whenever possible, only items bearing the union label; no better way existed to promote the union cause. Perpetual concern for the welfare of the workingman also encouraged frequent interest in such evils as the "loan shark" and credit buying, warning that cash purchases would yield a savings of fifteen to twenty percent.⁸

Much of the working-class population, including members of AFL-affiliated craft unions, who represented a kind of proletarian elite, shared the frequently tragic environment described by reporter George Waverly Briggs in

⁵See organizer reports in the AFL monthly, *American Federationist*, vols. VII-X (1900-1903). The various crafts and skills represented among locals formed in Houston and other Texas cities included locals of plumbers, electricians, painters, carpenters, paperhangers and others in the building trades, in addition to butchers and meatcutters, retail clerks, barbers, printers, leatherworkers, shoemakers, cigarmakers, blacksmiths, flour mill workers, cooks and waiters, telephone workers, bartenders, brewery workers, stonecutters, laundry workers, garment workers, streetcar employees, and laborers.

⁶Quote from Fort Worth *Union Banner*, October 15, 1910. Practically every labor paper in Texas urged all union men to pay their poll taxes each year. For example see San Antonio *Weekly Dispatch*, January 23, 1904; *Houston Labor Journal*, December 11, 1909; *Dallas Laborer*, January 22, 29, 1910; Fort Worth *Union Banner*, October 29, 1910. For Fricke's proposal see *Proceedings*, Texas State Federation of Labor, 1907, p. 17. The Houston Labor Council held a special meeting in February 1903 to consider ways to pay poll taxes for members; as a result of the meeting, several unions agreed to pay the poll tax for their members. See *Galveston Journal*, February 7, 1903.

⁷*American Federationist*, XV (August 1908), 626; *Galveston Journal*, August 30, 1907.

⁸*Houston Labor Journal*, August 13, 1910, January 18, October 26, December 12, 1912, February 1, 1913; *Proceedings*, Texas State Federation of Labor, 1910, p. 92.

a 1911 study of housing conditions in Texas cities.⁹

Only in Houston did Briggs find the "dark room" so prevalent in New York City tenements; although not widespread in Houston at the time of the investigation, Briggs noted that "[o]nce the dark room takes hold, its elimination becomes a matter of vast expense and indefatigable effort." His investigation revealed a dozen or more dark rooms in some downtown boarding houses. Dark rooms, rendered more sinister by overcrowding, had only one portal through which any light and ventilation entered—a door opening into an interior hall. Briggs also found San Antonio-type "jacals" in Houston, populated by Mexicans and transient lodgers. An inadequate sewer system, overcrowding in working-class homes and boarding houses, and many weed-filled open ditches retaining stagnant pools of water combined to create a major mosquito problem in the Bayou City.¹⁰

Labor movement success around the turn of the century led to an "employers' mass offensive" against organized labor severely affecting AFL membership, which declined from 1,675,000 in 1904 to 1,450,000 in 1906, and still remained well below the 1904 figure by 1910. The National Association of Manufacturers, under David M. Parry, assumed leadership in 1903 of the employer association drive to achieve the open shop and promoted a concerted educational campaign to attack the "un-American" closed shop advocated by organized labor. Ministers and educators, such as president Charles W. Eliot of Harvard University, endorsed the open shop, and hundreds of communities observed the appearance of citizens' alliances designed to promote the open shop cause.¹¹

Undaunted by the attack, organized labor fought back. Samuel Gompers, through editorials in the *American Federationist*, pointed out that employers' associations often used one set of principles for publication, but practiced quite a different set; that while employers claimed to differentiate between "conservative" and "radical" unions, they labeled all strikes or other action

⁹George Waverly Briggs, *The Housing Problem in Texas: A Study of Physical Conditions Under Which the Other Half Lives* (n.p., n.d.). This 96 page pamphlet reprinted the November-December 1911, articles in the *Galveston-Dallas News*. Briggs, an admirer of Lawrence Veiller, chief architect of the New York Tenement House Act of 1901 and the dominant figure in housing reform during the Progressive Era, recommended public education and enactment of restrictive legislation based on the New York model by either municipal or state government; private philanthropy had proved inadequate in northern cities. See Roy Lubove, "Lawrence Veiller and the New York State Tenement House Commission of 1900," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLVII (March 1961), 659-677, *The Progressives and the Slums: Tenement House Reform in New York City, 1890-1917* (Pittsburgh, 1962); Briggs, *Housing Problem in Texas*, 80-96.

¹⁰Briggs, *Housing Problem in Texas*, 70-81.

¹¹John R. Commons and associates, *History of Labor in the United States, 1896-1932*, IV; Selig Perlman and Philip Taft, *Labor Movements* (New York, 1966, reprint of 1935 edition), 129-137. Hereafter cited as Perlman and Taft, *Labor Movements*. Joseph G. Rayback, *A History of American Labor*, (New York, 1966), 213-215, 226; Charles W. Eliot, "Employers' Policies in the Industrial Strife," *Harper's Monthly*, CX (March 1905), 528-533.

they disliked as "radical"; that they employed private detective agencies to infiltrate unions to spy and provoke trouble. Furthermore, while employers ostensibly made the distinction between "conservative" and "radical" unions, they never recognized the existence of differing categories of employers.¹²

The objectives and tactics of the citizens' alliance-open shop movement received considerable attention from the Texas State Federation of Labor. "In a majority of cases," the TSFL president stated in 1904, "the larger strikes have been forced upon union labor by the trust combinations, and so wide spread have been the troubles that they appear like a premeditated concert of attack by monopolistic capital against union labor."¹³

The open shop crusade in Texas settled on the streetcar industry as a focal point in 1903 and 1904. Encouraged by the success elsewhere of the "employers' mass offensive against unionism" and receiving direct aid from proselytizing tours to Texas by open shop organizers like J. West Goodwin, a militant proponent of the employers' cause and author of the open shop victory at Sedalia, Missouri, sympathizers organized citizens' alliances across the state. Following a similar strategy in a number of Texas cities, employers provoked strikes by arbitrarily dismissing workers, refusing arbitration and, indeed, by denying all union demands; these tactics brought about strikes in Beaumont, Waco, El Paso, San Antonio and Houston. The San Antonio and Houston companies imported professional strikebreakers from out of state, hired in advance, immediately after the strikes began. Despite open shop propaganda disseminated by the citizens' alliance front, evidence of considerable, though not united, community support for the union position existed, particularly in editorial opinion in the daily press and pronouncements by community leaders.¹⁴

In 1901 a Boston corporation assumed control of Houston's streetcar franchise, the Houston Electric Company. Within a short time, the new owners "evidenced a strong determination to rid themselves of the troublesome" union of streetcar workers. A 1902 strike in which the union's cause received support from the Businessmen's League gained for the workers a pay

¹²*American Federationist*, VIII (January 1901), 12-14; *ibid.*, X (July 1903), 570-572; *ibid.*, XIV (September 1907), 673-675. For discussion of the open shop question from the point of view of the labor press see San Antonio *Weekly Dispatch*, April 18, 1903, Dallas *Laborer*, January 21, February 4, 1905. On employer use of detective agencies see Galveston *Journal*, September 27, 1907.

¹³*Proceedings*, Texas State Federation of Labor, 1904, pp. 3-4; *ibid.*, 1905, p. 7.

¹⁴Jay Littman Todes, "Organized Employer Opposition to Unionism in Texas, 1900-1930" (M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1949), 19-41, is the most thorough study of the attack on unions in the Texas streetcar industry. For the sometimes surprisingly progressive attitude of the conservative and middle-of-the-road daily press toward the streetcar strikes see Bruce J. Weber, "Progressive Mind in Texas, A Survey of Journalistic Response to Labor Radicalism, Violence, and Socialism 1900-1916" (M.A. thesis, University of Houston, 1973), 9-26; on the Houston streetcar strike see Zeigler, "The Limits of Power." Weber and Zeigler give considerable evidence in support of Herbert Gutman's thesis that the workingman often had widespread community support against "alien" corporations.

increase, promise of union recognition, an arbitration agreement, and several other concessions in a one year contract.¹⁵

The union made new demands in 1903, but when blacks boycotted streetcar usage in protest of a new city segregation ordinance, the union, in response to a company plea, sided with their employers, and extended the contract for another year. Houston's skilled trades remained segregated and the streetcar workers intended them to stay segregated. The company, however, obviously more interested in its financial situation, soon sought repeal of the ordinance.¹⁶

By March 1904, the Houston Electric Company began a policy of coercion against union members and suspect applicants for employment in an ill-concealed drive to destroy the union. The company's discharge of nineteen employees, including sixteen union men, led to demands to invoke the contract's arbitration clause. Labor agitation intensified when the arbitration board favored the company, whose officials then denied further negotiations and fired additional union men. The workers voted to strike on June 2 and made a further plea for arbitration. The company spurned further negotiations, including an appeal from Samuel Gompers.¹⁷

The streetcar workers began the strike with the endorsement of the Houston Labor Council and considerable community support; some citizens even walked to work. Immediately after the strike began, the electric company called in professional strikebreakers, hired in advance and stationed in San Antonio and Denison to await the company's call.¹⁸

The strike followed a pattern similar to the San Antonio strike of the previous year; most of the violence consisted of "obstructions on the tracks, fist fights, stoning of cars and vile epithets. Five separate acts of dynamiting in June and July, however, wrecked streetcars and contributed to an increasingly tense atmosphere." Labor disclaimed responsibility for the acts of violence. According to a Houston *Post* report, a chapter of the Citizens' Alliance organized in Houston at this time, an indication that formal initiation of an open shop campaign came late to the Bayou City in comparison with other Texas municipalities, but, in any event, a shift away from community support for unionism soon became apparent after the dynamiting. The twenty-four hour jailing of Max Andrew, president of the Texas State Federation of Labor, publisher of the Houston *Labor Journal* and a conservative, well-respected citizen, for failure to answer questions before a grand jury illustrated the community shift away from union support.¹⁹

¹⁵Zeigler, "The Limits of Power," 11-13; Houston *Post*, December 2, 4, 5, 1902.

¹⁶Zeigler, "The Limits of Power," 13-15.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 15-17; "Petition of Street Car Motormen to Houston Electric Co.," reprinted in Houston *Chronicle*, June 2, 1904; Samuel Gompers to Houston Street Railway Company, July 8, 1904, Houston Electric Company to Gompers, July 19, 1904, Gompers Letterbooks.

¹⁸Galveston *Journal*, June 4, 11, 1904; San Antonio *Weekly Dispatch*, June 4, 11, 1904; Houston *Post*, June 8, 10, 1904.

¹⁹Weber, "Progressive Mind in Texas," 21; Zeigler, "The Limits of Power," 20-22; Houston *Post*, June 12, 21, 1904; *Proceedings*, Texas State Federation of Labor, 1904, pp. 3-4, 23-24.

Further dynamiting strengthened the cause of the Citizens' Alliance, and despite rewards offered by the city government, the Houston Electric Company, the chief of police, and the American Federation of Labor through general organizer C. W. Woodman, the culprits remained at large. Years later, Woodman claimed that the Houston police did not seriously investigate the dynamiting until he challenged the chief of police to post a \$500 reward if Woodman offered \$1,500. "He did so," Woodman explained, "and from the moment the rewards were posted all dynamiting ceased. Of course, there were no arrests. We knew the company had hired men for this purpose, but could not prove [it]." Woodman declared that such violence typically "is caused by men hired for that purpose by the companies against whom the men are striking." Every employer, according to Woodman, knew violence would lead to public sympathy for him, while every union knew any violence would be charged to labor. "This being true," Woodman asked, "who is likely to commit violations of the law?"²⁰ Nonetheless, the dynamiting alienated many citizens and support for the union's boycott of streetcars began to dissipate as the strike continued through August, September, and into October. The union reluctantly called off the strike on October 11. Indeed, events in Houston followed the pattern set in San Antonio: the long duration and inconvenience of the strike, coupled with the violence, alienated middle-class citizens which included the members of the streetcar union in normal circumstances. Now union members often found themselves, thanks to the Citizens' Alliance, labeled as using the methods and tactics of radicals and anarchists. As in the San Antonio strike, however, the union still retained considerable community support. The *Houston Chronicle* and *Beaumont Journal* took surprisingly pro-labor editorial positions, and even the more conservative *Houston Post* denied labor's responsibility for the violence, which all decried.²¹

Despite the success of the open shop offensive in dealing with the streetcar workers, organizers for the American Federation of Labor from all parts of Texas during the period 1904 to 1907 continued to report good conditions for organized workers and general success against the advocates of the open shop. By 1905 there seemed to be indications of a weakening of the Citizens' Alliances, as some businessmen began openly to support the use of arbitration in labor disputes.²²

²⁰*Houston Post*, July 7, 8, 1904; C. W. Woodman to Gordon Fuller, February 12, 1911, C. W. Woodman Letterbook (Labor Movement in Texas Collection, Barker Library, University of Texas at Austin); hereafter cited as Woodman Letterbook.

²¹Zeigler, "The Limits of Power," 23-27; Weber, "Progressive Mind in Texas," 21-26; *Houston Post*, June 4, 6, October 12, 1904; *Houston Chronicle*, June 3, 4, 1904; *Beaumont Journal*, June 6, 14, 1904.

²²*San Antonio Weekly Dispatch*, January 21, 1905; *American Federationist*, XI (February 1904), 147; *ibid.* (March 1904), 238; *ibid.*, XII (April 1905), 231; *ibid.* (May 1905), 306; *ibid.* (July 1905), 463; *ibid.* (November 1905), 860; *ibid.*, XIII (May 1906), 336; *ibid.* (July 1906), 484; *ibid.*, XIV (September 1907), 697.

By the end of the initial decade of the century, organized labor in Texas, after weathering the open shop attack, seemed to be prospering, both as to organization and in terms of public acceptance. A willingness to overlook the plight of the unorganized allowed the labor establishment to take no small amount of pride in their accomplishments and to look confidently to the future.

The period 1911 to 1918, normally considered to be the years when progressivism reached its heights, was a time in which skilled Texas craftsmen frequently shared in the fruits of prosperity. Members of trade unions, usually affiliated with the AFL, the State Federation of Labor, and community trades councils, frequently became prominent citizens and their unions won public and corporate acceptance.

A committee of the Houston Labor Council noted in 1911 that the city's industrial work force of 25,000 was composed of 15,000 men, 6,000 women, and 4,000 children under fifteen years of age. Fifty-five percent of the men were organized, but only two percent of the women; a total of eighty-five percent of the skilled trades were organized. During a ten-year span immediately prior to 1911, workers' wages rose by twenty-five percent; the cost of living during the same period, however, increased by forty percent.²³

The strongest of Houston's numerous and well-established unions, all one hundred percent organized, included brewery workers, printers and printing pressmen, coopers, plumbers, bridge and structural iron workers, and marble workers. Members of these unions frequently enjoyed good working conditions, at least moderately good pay, and generally steady work, although seasonal in some cases; ninety percent of Houston's common laborers, on the other hand, remained unorganized, with a twenty-five percent unemployment rate. The only women's union in Houston, the garment workers, consisted of about two hundred members.²⁴

By 1911, union labor in Houston enjoyed good community support and performed "all important work" in the city; little heritage remained from the open shop movement.²⁵ Reports from AFL organizers in Texas during 1911 indicate economic conditions for organized workers across the state similar to those in Houston.²⁶

²³H. H. Carroll, Jr., (ed.), *Standard History of Houston Texas: From a Study of the Original Sources* (Knoxville, Tennessee, 1912), 306.

²⁴Other one hundred percent organized, but smaller and less important, unions included bookbinders and elevator conductors. Those ninety percent or better organized included plasterers, sheetmetal workers, brickmasons, and boilermakers. Electrical workers, bartenders, journeyman barbers, stationary engineers, and painters, decorators, and paperhangers were about eighty percent organized, while seventy-five percent of horseshoers and sixty-five percent of blacksmiths were organized. Pay in these trades ranged from \$3 to \$7 per day. Garment workers' pay ranged from \$9 to \$18 per week; male common laborers made from \$1.25 to \$2 per day, *ibid.*, 306-312.

²⁵*ibid.*, 307.

²⁶*American Federationist*, XVIII (April 1911), 322-323; *ibid.*, (July 1911), 555; *ibid.*, (September 1911), 741; *ibid.*, (October 1911), 840.

In the midst of varying degrees of socio-economic conditions suffered, or enjoyed, as the case might be, by Texas workers, railroad shop employees during 1911-1915 engaged the powerful Harriman and Illinois Central railway systems in a massive struggle extending from Mississippi and Kentucky to the West Coast. Mighty railroad monopolies emerging from the cutthroat wars of the late nineteenth century left a handful of men in control of these empires by means of interlocking directorates.²⁷ Unlike the railroad brotherhoods, composed of highly skilled, relatively scarce, and independent unions of firemen, engineers, trainmen, and conductors, the shop craft employees tended to affiliate with the AFL; shopmen included machinists, sheet metal workers, tanners, coppermiths, painters, steamfitters, boiler-makers, blacksmiths, electricians, and clerks. These individual unions provided little competition for powerful railroad combinations attempting to impose piecework and wage reductions. In self-defense the shopmen moved in the direction of industrial unionism with the formation of system federations—coalitions of all shopmen of each railroad system. While the railroad combinations feared a reincarnation of Eugene V. Debs' American Railway Union, the AFL, in an attempt to forestall a move toward dual unionism, created a Railway Employees' Department (RED) in 1908 to coordinate activities of various system federations. The RED, however, concentrated on legislative activities and remained largely ineffective until stimulated to new life by the 1911 strike. Shopmen believed that collectivism on the part of their employers left them no alternative but to form a coalition enabling them to negotiate from a position of strength. Employer refusal to recognize the system federations led to the 1911 strikes, which included the Harriman lines in Texas.²⁸

Shopmen of the Harriman and Illinois Central railway combines formed separate system federations in June 1911, demanded recognition of their associations, and negotiations over wages, hours, and working conditions. Frightened by the specter of industrial unions capable of immobilizing all railroad traffic in one massive general strike, railroad officials insisted that recognition of the system federations would subject every form of industry in the United States to union control, a "supreme and unlimited power" incompatible with a "democratic form of government." With management proclaiming a disposition to meet with the separate unions of shopmen but refusing to counsel with the federation, shopmen voted overwhelmingly to

²⁷The Harriman network included the Southern Pacific, Union Pacific, Oregon Short Line, and Santa Fe Railroads, and Union Pacific owned managing interest in Illinois Central stock. See Graham Adams, Jr., *Age of Industrial Violence, 1910-15: The Activities and Findings of the United States Commission on Industrial Relations* (New York and London, 1966), 129.

²⁸Adams, *Age of Industrial Violence*, 127-129; U. S. Senate, *Industrial Relations: Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations Created by the Act of August 23, 1912* (Document No. 415, 64th Congress, 1st Session, 1916), X, 9756, 9761-9762. Hereafter cited as *Testimony*. Perlman and Taft, *Labor Movements*, 369-370; Philip Taft, *The A. F. of L. in the Time of Gompers* (New York, 1957), 219-220.

walk out in September 1911. The nation's daily press, strongly endorsing the management cause, refused to publicize the shopmen's side of the dispute. As RED president A. O. Wharton explained before the United States Commission on Industrial Relations in 1915, the system federations could not "purchase the publicity that the employer is able to secure by paying for the information to be circulated through the daily press." By contrast, "[o]ur means of communication are practically nil so far as the public is concerned."²⁹

Although the strike initially involved more than 30,000 employees nationally, the railroads found numerous detective agencies more than willing to furnish replacements for the strikers as well as guards; confrontations and violence soon erupted between union pickets and strikebreakers, the latter often aided by police and troops. Mistaken for a strikebreaker, a traveling companion of Texas governor Oscar B. Colquitt was assaulted at the Union Depot in New Orleans, while a Houston sniper killed one scab and wounded three others as guards escorted strikebreakers through union pickets into the Southern Pacific compound.³⁰

Management refusal to compromise encouraged the striking workers to assume a more militant stance and, with machinists taking the lead, in April 1912, they formed a Federation of Federations over the various system federations. The RED effected a merger at its next convention when it endorsed the new organization's constitution. While the strike officially lasted until the summer of 1915, unswerving management determination to defeat a renewal of industrial unionism despite the numerous incidents of violence, bloodshed, and industrial accidents, along with the ready availability of detective agencies to provide a scab labor force, combined to defeat the workers' cause. While the shopmen failed to obtain their immediate objectives, the episode provided an important lesson to all American workingmen willing to learn from the experience: management federations inevitably provided adversaries more formidable than individual unions, and organized labor could hope to compete against such antagonists only by fashioning comparable organizations.³¹

During the railroad conflict, president William L. Hoefgen of the Texas State Federation of Labor reported significant membership gains to the delegates attending the 1912 convention.³² Members of organized labor at this time relished a community reputation as alert, informed, and concerned citizens. Their activities ranged from condemnation of loan sharks to warning

²⁹*Testimony*, X, 9900-9911, 9725, 9744-9745, 9749, 9782, 9799, 9895, 9907; *Texas Railway Journal*, V (October 1911), 8; *El Paso Texas Union*, October 6, 27, 1911.

³⁰*Testimony*, X, 9710-9711, 9723-9724, 9732, 9754-9755, 9763-9764, 9877, 9878, 9951, 9962-9965; *Houston Post*, October 3, 1911; *El Paso Texas Union*, October 13, 1911.

³¹Adams, *Age of Industrial Violence*, 141-145; Perlman and Taft, *Labor Movements*, 371-373; Taft, *The A. F. of L. in the Time of Gompers*, 220.

³²In 1910 the state federation had 215 affiliated organizations representing a membership of 12,149, in 1911 there were 265 organizations and 14,470 members, and in 1912, 300 organizations and 17,108 members.

working-class mothers concerning the "freakish fashions which display shamelessly the physical rather than the innocent charms of young girls. . . ." Houston workers strongly supported a successful school bond issue and sponsored a visit by union leader John Mitchell to speak to a group of labor, business, and professional men on the philosophy and goals of the trade union movement. Mitchell's moderate position surprised and charmed Houston's "leading divines," who expected a "blatant demagogue."³³

In Houston and other Texas cities, the organization and activities of central trades councils frequently contributed to the achievement of harmonious relations with management and the general community. Also the customary use of union labor for public and private jobs contributed toward a growing acceptance of, and respect for, organized labor's role in the community. In various localities, central bodies waged campaigns against "blue laws" prohibiting Sunday operation of motion picture houses and vaudeville shows, pointing out that Sunday was the only day off for most working men to enjoy such amusements with their families. It also became commonplace for central labor unions to demonstrate compassion by providing relief funds for disaster victims and needy workers.³⁴

If members of craft unions in the cities enjoyed comparative prosperity and general community acceptance, women and children employed in Texas cotton mills and other factories did not. Texas cotton mills, located in cities such as Houston and Dallas as well as in the more rural settings of Denison, Bonham, and Itasca, generally employed between eighty and ninety people, the number of operating mills varying from twelve to sixteen during the period of 1910-1912. In January 1913, Eva Goldsmith of Houston, president of the state organization of the United Garment Workers' union, appeared before a committee of the state legislature to testify on behalf of the Lane-Wortham bill to limit the work of women to fifty-four hours per week, with a maximum of ten hours per day. Her moving account of working mothers required to toil twelve hours or more per day was followed by the testimony of mill owners who presented petitions from workers in their cotton mills opposing the legislation. Disclaiming accusations of coercion to force employees to sign the petition, mill owner J.C. Saunders of Bonham argued that his employees opposed the bill because they could not afford to work fewer hours for less pay, and the wage for "labor in Texas," he explained, "was now 25 per cent higher than in the Southern States with whose cotton

³³*Proceedings*, Texas State Federation of Labor, 1912, p. 15; *Galveston Labor Herald*, September 21, November 9, 16, 23, December 21, 1912; *Houston Labor Journal*, May 27, 1911; Minutes, Houston Labor Council, October 16, 1912 (Division of Archives and Manuscripts, University of Texas at Arlington).

³⁴*El Paso Texas Union*, September 19, 1913; *American Federationist*, XXII (June 1915), 448; Minutes, Houston Labor Council, March 18, December 9, 1913, *Houston Labor Journal*, October 12, 1912. On November 22, 1907 the *Galveston Journal*, the official organ of the Galveston Labor Council, criticized the Sunday closing during the past weekend of theaters in Houston and the arrest of owners and performers.

mills those of Texas compete. . . ." Agents of the National Child Labor Investigating Committee reported that Texas mills not only worked women and children long hours, but that grown men, commanding higher wages, frequently received only part-time work or lost their jobs altogether to children. The legislature enacted the fifty-four law, and by 1917 the *Houston Labor Journal* reported that members of the garment workers' union "are among the best paid . . . female wage earners." Furthermore, the union's efforts had virtually eliminated competition from convict-made goods and had reduced the demand for nonunion made garments.³⁵

The end of the century's opening decade was accomplished by an "age of industrial violence," highlighted by such spectacular eruptions as the bombing of the Los Angeles *Times* building, the 1911 railroad conflict, the Lawrence and Patterson strikes conducted by the Industrial Workers of the World, and the Ludlow massacre, which led to a drive initiated and conducted by a group of social workers, university professors, and other progressives culminating in the formation of the United States Commission on Industrial Relations, under Frank P. Walsh.³⁶

The Commission held hearings in Dallas early in 1915 on the plight of tenant farmers in the Southwest³⁷ and sent investigators David J. Saposs and Peter A. Speck through Texas in an attempt to isolate the underlying causes of industrial conflict. The Texas reports of Saposs concentrated on restrictions placed upon "self-government and freedom of action in isolated industrial communities,"³⁸ while Speck, in his travels across the state, studied a great variety of social and industrial conditions.³⁹

³⁵Field Notes of Lewis J. Hine, Child Labor Conditions in Texas," National Child Labor Committee Papers, Box 3 (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); hereafter cited as National Child Labor Committee Papers; "Senator Spinks," *ibid.*; Alexander J. McKelway to editor, the *Sun*, April 30, 1910, Alexander J. McKelway Papers, Box 3 (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); hereafter cited as Alexander J. McKelway Papers; *Galveston Daily News*, January 26, 1913; *Fort Worth Union Banner*, March 12, 16, 1912; *Houston Labor Journal*, October 20, 1917.

³⁶Mark Perlman, *Labor Union Theories in America: Background and Development* (Evanston, Illinois and White Plains, New York, 1958), 279; Allen F. Davis, "The Campaign for the Industrial Relations Commission, 1911-1913," *Mid-America*, XLV (October 1963), 211-228. The designation "age of industrial violence" comes from Graham Adams, Jr., *Age of Industrial Violence, 1910-15: The Activities and Findings of the United States Commission on Industrial Relations* (New York and London, 1966).

³⁷*Testimony*, IX, 8949-9056, X, 9057-9290.

³⁸John R. Commons of the United States Commission of Industrial Relations turned over a portion of the reports and studies prepared by the CIR's Division of Research and Investigation to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. The Wisconsin set has been microfilmed by the National Archives and comprises 15 reels. David J. Saposs's essay, "Self-Government and Freedom of Action in Isolated Industrial Communities" may be found in Reel II. (The set of 15 reels is available in the University of Houston library.) Also see the interviews conducted by Saposs in "Company Towns," Box II, United States Commission on Industrial Relations Papers (Department of Labor, Record Group 174, National Archives); hereafter cited as CIR Records.

³⁹P. A. Speck, "Report on Conditions in Labor camps," CIR Records, I45 S9; Speck interview with E. R. Meitzen and W. S. Noble, n.p., n.d., *ibid.*, SPEEK SC 299; Speck interview with H. J.

Speek found Houston to be a center of unemployment upon his October 1914 visit during which he observed and interviewed numerous members of the working class. Speek classified the unemployed into three groups. The "real down-and-outs," composed of old-time immigrants and natives and known variously as "rounders" or "birds of passage," wintered in the cities of southeastern Texas after "freighting" in from cities such as Chicago, Kansas City, and St. Louis. These winter visitors applied for charity, begged, and, when necessary, competed with Negroes for odd jobs. The majority of these "down-and-outs" began a return migration northward each spring. "Home-seekers," lured to Texas by real estate and land development companies, often with the aid of propaganda disseminated by commercial clubs and the manufacturers' association, lost their money—frequently several thousand dollars—by investing in land deals organized by dishonest real estate and businessmen. Many subsequently fell prey to eager loan sharks. A large percentage of "home seekers," composed of natives and old-time immigrants, including Germans, Italians, Austrian Slavs, and a few Russian Jews, remained in the Houston area as casual laborers. Speek discovered that ordinary common laborers, rather than "down-and-outs," represented the largest cadre of the unemployed; about one half in this category were Negroes and Mexicans. Finding it fruitless to apply for charity, these workers performed odd jobs when available, refused to beg, but often stole food from suburban homes. Two men, usually a white and a black, would approach a home when the lady of the house was out. The white man would knock on the door and engage the cook, usually a Negro woman, in a conversation about odd jobs or a fictitious address while his accomplice entered the kitchen through a rear door and filled a sack with provisions. The poor victimized cook usually attempted to hide the theft, lest her employer accuse her; subsequent discovery frequently led to the filing of formal charges against Negro cooks.⁴⁰

All categories of the unemployed repeatedly fell victim to loan sharks and private employment services, both of whom enjoyed complete freedom from any type of supervision or licensing requirement; most private agencies, often in collusion with employers, took full advantage of the situation, perpetrating gross malpractice against the working class. Railroad companies, working through private employment agents, regularly imported men from a considerable distance from the construction camp to make it difficult for the men to quit after becoming aware of camp conditions. Frequently accepting large application fees from many workers for a small number of jobs, private employment offices then exacted exorbitant fees from those obtaining work.

Buest, Houston, Texas, October 12, 1914, *ibid.*, Speek interview with Jacob H. Schultz, Houston, Texas, October 13, 1914, *ibid.*, file 304; Speek interview with I. A. Starling, Austin, Texas, October 15, 1914, *ibid.*, file 299.

On occasion, some of the most unscrupulous agents advertised and solicited registration fees for bogus jobs. Complaints deriving from such abuses stimulated a movement for free municipal employment services, which a number of Texas cities came to establish.⁴¹

Houstonians interviewed by Speek included several men prominent in the local labor establishment, Socialist Party members, and socialist sympathizers such as Jacob H. Schultz, manager of the free public employment office conducted by the Social Service Federation, a charitable institution. E. B. Hadsall, business agent for the Houston Building Trades Council and Socialist Party candidate for county commissioner, Ira Tucker and E. C. Kuester, Socialist Party officials, and socialist sympathizer H. J. Buest, an official in city and state building trades councils, agreed that the state's AFL-oriented labor lobby represented a powerful force which successfully engineered a number of seemingly beneficial laws through the legislature. Unfortunately, however, the inability of the labor commissioner to enforce the legislation rendered any accomplishment, in their opinion, relatively meaningless. A subsequent interview with I. A. Starling, the state labor commissioner, corroborated the socialist allegations concerning problems of enforcement and frequent inadequacy of existing legislation.⁴²

By late 1914, as events in Europe increasingly dominated the nation's attention, members of organized labor speculated on the possible significance of these developments for the American workingman. During World War I the entire American labor movement achieved an unprecedented degree of collaboration with government and business; AFL-affiliated trade unions and community trades councils frequently won acceptance from both the public and local businessmen. Despite the Wilson administration's policy favoring government-business-union harmony, the actions of determined Houston oil producers during the 1917 strike of Texas and Louisiana oil field workers clearly demonstrated that some employers remained adamantly opposed to organized labor and greatly resented all concessions made to labor by the administration of Woodrow Wilson.⁴³

⁴⁰*ibid.* Speek interview with H. J. Buest, Houston, Texas, October 12, 1914, *ibid.*; Speek interview with Jacob H. Schultz, Houston, Texas, October 13, 1914, *ibid.*, file 304; Speek interview with I. A. Starling, Austin, Texas, October 15, 1914, *ibid.*, file 299; Speek, "Employment Offices in the State of Texas," CIR Records (Wisconsin set), Reel 5, I453 S7; C. W. Woodman to Hon. O. S. Lattimore January 29, 1911, Woodman Letterbook; Proceedings, Texas State Federation of Labor, 1915, p. 115; *Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Labor Statistics*, 1915-1916, pp. 5, 12-13, 18; *ibid.*, 1917-1918, pp. 26-27, 30-31.

⁴¹Speek interviews with H. J. Buest, E. B. Hadsall, Ira Tucker, and E. C. Kuester, Houston, Texas, October 12, 1914, CIR Records, SPEEK SC 299; Speek interview with Jacob R. Schultz, Houston, Texas, October 13, 1914, *ibid.*, file 304; Speek interview with I. A. Starling, Austin, Texas, October 15, 1914, *ibid.*, file 299.

⁴²James C. Maroney, "The Texas-Louisiana Oil Field Strike of 1917" in Gary M Fink and Merl R. Reed (eds.), *Essays in Southern Labor History* (Westport, Connecticut, 1977), 161-172; William Lee Greer, "The Texas Gulf Coast Oil Strike of 1917" (M.A. thesis, University of Houston, 1974).

After the war, the American labor establishment, anticipating a continuation of the wartime collaboration with government and business, initially looked to postwar reconstruction problems with not a little optimism. In the face of vociferous opposition to United States participation in World War I by the Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World, leaders of government, business, and labor, buttressed by the media—especially the labor press—continually extolled organized labor's contribution toward bringing the war to a successful conclusion. Thus buoyed with a newly won sense of pride, dignity, and worthiness, workingmen appeared to have some basis for their hopes of maintaining the beneficial wartime cooperation.⁴⁴ Soon, however, the labor movement experienced significant setbacks in a postwar era in which the Red Scare and a new open shop movement flourished.

By the fall of 1919 employers across Texas and the nation at large reacted to rising prices and sporadic labor militancy by resurrecting the open shop or "American Plan," a movement which had faded into near obscurity over the years, but had never entirely dissipated since the drive of 1903-1908.⁴⁵

In 1920, open shop associations appeared in Beaumont, San Antonio, Dallas, Sherman, and other Texas cities. Texas, in fact, existed in the heartland of open shop activity⁴⁶ and in many areas pressure on merchants and businessmen to conform became well-nigh irresistible despite the efforts of AFL unions to disassociate themselves from any taint of radicalism. Labor shortages or other local factors, however, led chambers of commerce in Houston, Amarillo, and Fort Worth, the latter with a strong union tradition, to spurn requests from the U. S. Chamber to sponsor local open shop associations.⁴⁷

Unfortunately for organized labor, the open shop coexisted with and became an integral part of the great Red Scare of 1919-1920. According to Robert K. Murray, "the problem of inflation served merely as the superficial cause for much of the . . . labor unrest"; the real issues at stake were the rights of unionism and collective bargaining, which represented to the average

⁴⁴Melvin Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865-1920* (New York, 1975), 126-127.

⁴⁵Allen M. Wakstein, "The Origins of the Open Shop Movement, 1919-1920," *Journal of American History*, LI (December 1964), 460-475; Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study of National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (New York, 1964. Reprint of 1955 edition), 92-93, 164-165, 267-269.

⁴⁶Since greatest open shop success occurred in the West South Central and East North Central states, Allen M. Wakstein posits "a correlation between a high degree of open-shop activity and a moderate degree of industrialization and unionization." See Wakstein, "Origins of the Open-Shop Movement," 470.

⁴⁷Todes, "Organized Employer Opposition to Unionism," 52-53, 79; Thomas B. Brewer, "State Anti-Labor Legislation: Texas—A Case Study," *Labor History*, XI (Winter 1970), 63-64; Wakstein, "Origins of the Open-Shop Movement," 463-464, 470; San Antonio *Weekly Dispatch*, June 14, 21, August 2, October 25, 1919; Galveston *Union Review*, May 16, 1919; El Paso *Labor Advocate*, July 23, 1920; F. Ray Marshall, *Labor in the South* (Cambridge, 1967), 27.

businessman "the ultimate capitulation of organized capital."⁴⁸ In Texas, the Red Scare atmosphere became apparent in Colonel Billie Mayfield's use of the race issue and the question of unionism to increase the size of the Texas National Guard. Mayfield's circular letter, a follow-up to an appeal for one hundred dollar contributions by General Jacob F. Wolters of the 7th Cavalry regiment in Houston, proposed to explain in detail the need for additional troops in Houston. Mayfield claimed "a great feeling of unrest [existed] among the negroes of this country accentuated by the returning A. E. F. negroes" and IWW agitation. Not only would the local police prove inadequate to contend with an uprising, according to Mayfield, but he warned darkly that "[t]here is a movement to unionize the police force of Houston. If this should happen what chance would a mill operator or any large employer of labor have for protection against property damage or personal violence with union police standing by? Not a dam [sic] bit, and you know it and I know it." The Houston Labor Council denounced the solicitation of funds by Wolters and Mayfield as a "reflection on the name of Organized Labor and a slur against the high aims and principles for which Unionism stands."⁴⁹

In a tension-charged atmosphere bred by the Red Scare and rising fears of racial warfare, the most dramatic confrontation between organized labor and open shop forces came at Galveston in 1920. The conflict in nearby Galveston resulted in an open shop victory and the passage of an Open Port Law by the Texas Legislature. The Open Port Law made any interference with the loading, unloading, or transporting of commerce in the state illegal. Before the law was declared unconstitutional in 1926, it was used on several occasions, most notably during a national strike of railroad shop workers in 1922, when the law was invoked in Houston and a number of other Texas cities. An interesting incident during the longshoremen's strike involving Houston occurred when the Houston *Labor Journal* charged Colonel Billie Mayfield of the Texas National Guard with attempting to kidnap the editor of the *Houston Press*, G. V. Sanders, at the Houston Country Club, some fifty miles away from the Galveston military zone. Sanders allegedly published articles which Mayfield claimed might incite Galveston residents to riot. According to the *Labor Journal*, a subsequent military courts-martial acquitted Mayfield. Several labor papers charged that Wolters and Mayfield staged a fake riot with troops impersonating union longshoremen, while uniformed guardsmen rushed in with fixed bayonets to crush "a great riot" as motion pictures were taken of the whole scene.⁵⁰

Another important strike of the period, beginning July 1, 1922, embraced the railway shop crafts—boilermakers, blacksmiths, machinists, carmen,

⁴⁸Murray, *Red Scare*, 8.

⁴⁹Minutes, Houston Labor Council, September 12, 1919.

⁵⁰On the Galveston strike, see James C. Maroney, "The Galveston Longshoremen's Strike of 1920," *East Texas Historical Journal*, XVI (Spring 1978), 34-38.

electrical workers, sheetmetal workers, and stationary firemen—and involved initially about 400,000 workers nationally; within two weeks the total had climbed to approximately 600,000 men, including many maintenance-of-way employees and clerks who had joined the strikers. In Texas, the strike led to widespread application of the Open Port Law.⁵¹ Violence erupted in Houston and other localities as employers imported nonunion labor, mostly Mexican, and the Houston Labor Council found itself in need of some three thousand dollars for the trials of union men charged with violating an injunction issued by a federal court. Governor Pat Neff invoked the Open Port Law in Houston, Denison, Childress, Cleburne, Marshall, Sherman, Palestine, Temple, De Leon, Waco, Gainsville, Amarillo, Texline, Dalhart, and Big Spring, with Texas Rangers and soldiers of the National Guard maintaining order.⁵²

By September 1922, many employees began returning to work under the so-called Baltimore Agreement proposed by Daniel Willard, president of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and leader of a moderate group of railroad executives, whereby employees negotiated separate settlements with each road with no loss of seniority or discrimination against union members.⁵³

The open shop era obviously had a great effect on the organized labor movement in Texas. Grady Mullenix, historian of the Texas State Federation of Labor, concluded that “the organization hardly functioned at all” during the period 1920 to 1930 when it was dominated to a large extent by William J. Moran of El Paso, who received much of his support from the building trades. Largely limited to preserving the status quo, the state federation during the 1920s promoted Gompers conservatism and, according to Mullenix, made little attempt to challenge the business philosophy of presidents Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge as expressed in Texas by governors Pat Neff and Dan Moody. Despite scarce and unreliable records, TSFL membership, in excess of 50,000 in 1920, stood at slightly more than 25,000 in 1927.⁵⁴

Reflecting the weakened condition of organized labor in the state, Negro delegates at the annual conventions of the state federation became even more rare than in former years. Representative of the shortsighted view common among white tradesmen, the Houston Labor Council in 1927 refused requests of black locals for affiliation, explaining that “under the present and prevailing conditions . . . it would not only be impractical, but almost impossible to admit . . . delegates from the colored unions.” John North, a black longshoreman from Houston, denounced such myopic thinking before

⁵¹Robert H. Zieger, *Republicans and Labor, 1919-1929* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1969), 109, 117-118; Seymour V. Connor, *Texas A History* (New York, 1971), 316.

⁵²Houston Post, July 9, 1913, 1922; *American Federationist*, XXIX (September, 1922), 701; Minutes, Houston Labor Council, December 19, 1922; Connor, *Texas*, 316.

⁵³Taft, *The A. F. of L. in the Time of Gompers*, 474; Perlman and Taft, *Labor Movements*, 522-523.

⁵⁴Grady L. Mullenix, “A History of the Texas State Federation of Labor” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1955), 184, 242, 254-255, 294.

the Texas State Federation of Labor and complained about the TSFL's lack of interest in organizing the Negro. Professing allegiance to the white man and his organized labor establishment, North declared “[w]e want to be loyal to you and we want you to protect us.” He also none too subtly warned the organization not to ignore the black man lest employers more fully utilize blacks in a nonunion labor force and totally destroy black unionism in such well-entrenched pockets as longshoring, where black and white locals had shared work in many Gulf ports harmoniously for many years on a fifty-fifty basis.⁵⁵

North, and other observers, had identified a developing trend in the South and nation in the 1920s which had disturbing consequences for organized labor. Despite increased industrialization and mechanization at a time when organized labor possessed a poor public image in the aftermath of the open shop drive, dogged adherence to AFL craft unionism foreordained that craft unions inexorably would become smaller and more elitist during the “prosperity decade” of the 1920s.⁵⁶

By the mid-1920s, as the persistent trend toward elitism continued, building trades unions and organizations of other skilled craftsmen prospered in many Texas communities. New locals and central trades councils were organized or reestablished as such skilled craftsmen, providing valuable services for local businessmen and municipal projects, developed harmonious community relations, often winning support from the local chamber of commerce; in fact, many union members joined the chamber and other civic organizations, and various locals affiliated directly with chambers of commerce.⁵⁷

This is not to say that no hostility to organized labor remained; open shop sentiment sometimes became evident.⁵⁸ The trend, however, remained clear: their ranks for the most part divested of unskilled factory workers and organizations among workers in industries controlled by large national corporations, skilled craftsmen in Texas, themselves members of middle-class society, frequently developed excellent relations with local businessmen and

⁵⁵Minutes, Houston Labor Council, September 16, 1927; *Proceedings*, Texas State Federation of Labor, 1927, pp. 57-60; *ibid.*, 1929, pp. 60-63. On the longshoremen's union and their racial practices see James C. Maroney, “The International Longshoremen's Association in the Gulf States During the Progressive Era,” *Southern Studies*, XVI (Summer 1977) 225-232.

⁵⁶Clarence E. Bonnett, “The Industrialization of the South in Relation to Labor,” *American Federationist*, XXXV (November 1928), 1309; Thomas E. Jones, “Some Problems of Negro and White Labor in the South,” *ibid.*, 1331; Mullenix, “History of the Texas State Federation of Labor,” 293; Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker*, 133; Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker 1920-1933* (Baltimore, 1966), 47-189.

⁵⁷*American Federationist*, XXXIII (April 1926), 499; *ibid.*, (May 1926), 624; XXXIV (May 1927), 451; XXXV (November 1928), 1379-1380; Houston Labor Journal, January 8, 15, 26, 1926; El Paso Labor Advocate, April 23, 1926; *Proceedings*, Texas State Federation of Labor, 1927, pp. 32, 101-105; *ibid.*, 1928, pp. 96-99; *ibid.*, 1929, p. 92.

⁵⁸*Proceedings*, Texas State Federation of Labor, 1927, p. 106; *ibid.*, 1928, p. 95.

other citizens.⁵⁹ Locals, often able to win commitments from municipal governments and local businessmen to utilize only union labor, jealously guarded their established position by carefully regulating union membership and charging sizable initiation fees. For the franchised member, however, the benefits were many. In addition to reasonably steady work and good pay, some locals provided sick pay and other benefits.⁶⁰

In retrospect, it is difficult to remain uncritical of the AFL craft union establishment when considering the policies they displayed toward such categories of workers as the unskilled, racial and ethnic minorities, and working women. The cavalier disregard of the perceptive analysis of Houston longshoreman John North in 1927 serves as a case in point. Any sympathies one might feel for the downtrodden, however, should be tempered by consideration of whether an increasingly militant policy would have secured more positive results in the 1900-1929 Texas setting than did the conservatism of the AFL labor establishment which produced, admittedly, only meager accomplishments. The conclusion arrived at here, somewhat reluctantly, is that the course followed by the Texas labor establishment accomplished as much as realistically could be expected by the working people of Houston during the formative years of their attempts at collective action, 1900-1929.

The great depression of 1929 brought about changes which ultimately led to a revolution in the American labor movement. Although the labor establishment in Texas and the nation remained a sort of aristocracy of the skilled through the 1920s and had done little for the majority of working people, the skilled tradesmen did provide a foundation in comparatively unindustrialized southern states like Texas for the establishment of working relations between local businessmen and an expanded labor movement.

⁵⁹Houston *Labor Journal*, April 16, May 21, December 24, 1926, contains evidence of business acceptance and even support of unionism. Examples included reports of prominent displays of union label goods in Houston department stores, when such merchants frequently refused to carry such goods ten years before, and a full page ad in the December 24, 1926, issue of the *HLJ*—the paper's thirty-fifth anniversary issue—in which several hundred business and professional men, merchants, and manufacturers presented greetings to organized labor in Houston recognizing that organized workers were always in the front ranks of those working for the existing good will and cooperation between business and organized labor in Houston.

⁶⁰See, for example, Minutes, United Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators, and Paperhangers, Local 855, Tyler, Texas, September 26, 1927 (Division of Archives, and Manuscripts, University of Texas at Arlington).

Robert P. Boyce: Nineteenth-Century Houstonian

Margaret S. Henson

In Glenwood Cemetery overlooking Buffalo Bayou a tall monument marks the grave of Robert P. Boyce and carries this message: "Peace Be Unto Thee Forever." If ever a man deserved quiet in the hereafter it was Robert Boyce because he led a tumultuous life indeed. He spent fifty-one of his seventy-four years carving himself a place in the history of Houston, and epitomises the restless, nineteenth century Irish-American immigrant to Houston and feisty Horatio Alger character. His obituary noted that he was "a powerful man though small in stature . . . quick and active . . . [and] . . . the best preserved man of his years in the world." Moreover, he was always "true to his friends" and "respected by his enemies, socially and politically."¹ Eventually, a street was named for him in the Denver Harbor neighborhood permanently stamping his name on the map of Houston. This essay will attempt to place him in his proper historical context and thus provide insight in the life of a representative Houston resident during the city's first years of development.

Robert Boyce arrived in Texas on April 19, 1836, about twenty-one years old. He did not take part in the battle of San Jacinto two days later; however, he was deeply involved in the founding of Houston. Being a carpenter, he built many of the first dwellings including the president's "palace" in 1837 and such notable structures as the Long Bridge over Buffalo Bayou in 1843. His career reflected that of the pre-professional architect/builder—the type of individual who was responsible for the Houston built environment prior to the turn of the twentieth century. His type of construction included the wooden frame structures that were most prevalent in the Bayou City during his lifetime. Also, Bob Boyce served the city as marshal and market master for a number of years thus involving himself in early community activity.

Boyce was born June 16, 1814 or 1816 near Cincinnati, Ohio. Before he was ten his father had left, and Bob soon followed suit. The runaway managed to get a job on a river boat, and for the next few years, young Boyce worked his way up and down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. When he was about

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¹Houston *Post*, February 17, 1890.