

The Future of the
American Labor Movement

HOYT N. WHEELER

University of South Carolina



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Hoyt N. Wheeler 2002

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2002

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Times Ten 9.75/12 pt. *System* QuarkXPress [BTS]

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data Available

ISBN 0 521 81533 9 hardback

ISBN 0 521 89354 2 paperback

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Introduction by Lynn R. Williams</i>	xiii
1 A Future for the American Labor Movement?	1
2 Industrial Relations in a Time of Change	25
3 A Survey of American Union Strategies	49
4 The Old Reformist Unionism: The Noble Order of the Knights of Labor	85
5 The New Reformist Unionism: CAFE	103
6 A New Version of an Old Reformist Strategy: Employee Ownership	118
7 Social Democratic Unionism in Action: Strategies of European Trade Unions	145
8 A New Twist and TURN on Social Democratic Unionism: Unions and Regional Economic Development	172
9 A Labor Movement for the Twenty-First Century	187
<i>Appendix Interview with John J. Sweeney, President, AFL-CIO</i>	217
<i>References</i>	221
<i>Index</i>	243

ONE

A Future for the American Labor Movement?

That so long as man shall live and have his being, so long as there shall dwell in the human heart a desire for something better and nobler, so long as there is in the human mind the germ of the belief in human justice and human liberty, so long as there is in the whole makeup of man a desire to be a brother to his fellow-man, so long will there be a labor movement.

Samuel Gompers, President, American Federation of Labor, 1904

As we begin the twenty-first century, many of the institutions of Western society are undergoing dramatic change. The labor movement in the United States has been especially affected by powerful economic and social forces. The threshold question in thinking about this is whether there is a future for the labor movement in advanced postindustrial societies. Is the very idea of a labor movement a viable one for the twenty-first century? This is an important question, given the contributions of trade unions and their allies to the development and maintenance of democracy, both in America's workplace and in its political system.

Even in this time of great change, the labor movement remains, in essence, what it has always been – a set of organizations and individuals that function to serve the rights and interests of workers. So long as the phenomenon of employment exists it would seem that there would be a social need, and worker demand, for organized instruments of economic and social power for those who are employed by others. Collective action by workers in defense of their interests is a natural and necessary response to the tensions of employment (Gompers 1919; Barbash 1984). This being the case, the questions then become the degree of power that the labor movement will have and the forms that it will take. However, as we shall see, even the basic premise that it will continue to exist is currently being called into question.

WHERE ARE WE, HOW DID WE GET THERE,
AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?

It is clear that the American labor movement is in trouble. In 2000, the percentage of the labor force unionized (“union density”) in the United States was 13.5 percent. In private industry, it stood at 9 percent, roughly what it was prior to the great surge of unionization in the 1930s. Among government employees American unions are doing much better, with 37.5 percent of them being union members in 2000 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2001). The reasons for this difference are not entirely clear, but it is likely that this is at least in part attributable to the lower level of management resistance to unions in the public sector.

In 2000, total union membership declined by 219,000, after going up by 300,000 in 1999 (Bureau of National Affairs 2000c, 2001a; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2001). Total union membership at the beginning of 2001 stood at 16.3 million (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2001). Organized labor’s decline in density has been rather steady since 1953, when the proportion of the labor force unionized stood at 32.5 percent (Troy and Sheflin 1985). Despite often heroic efforts on the part of dedicated American trade unionists over the years, the decline in union density has not been arrested.

Although American unionists have recently paid a great deal of attention to organizing new members, the results of these efforts have been mixed. On the one hand, in 1999 they managed to organize 74,000 home health-care workers in California, and have had some other significant victories in the last few years. On the other hand, in 2000 they were involved in only 2,849 representation elections, compared to 3,114 in 1999 and 3,229 in 1998. Their win rate did increase slightly from 51.3 percent in 1999 to 52.1 percent in 2000 (Bureau of National Affairs 2001b). These secret ballot elections, conducted by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), in which workers choose whether or not they want a union, have historically been the chief avenue for gaining new members. However, in recent years, there has been a great deal of organizing outside of the NLRB processes. Accordingly, their successes in organizing are not entirely captured by looking at election results.

Union performance has improved in decertification elections, in which workers vote on whether to get rid of their union. There were fewer in 1999 than in 1998 (373 compared to 475), and fewer in the first six months of 2000 compared to the same period in 1999 (188 compared to 199) (Bureau of National Affairs 2000e). Also, the union win rate increased between 1998 and 1999 (about 36 percent compared to about 30 percent in 1998) (Bureau of National Affairs 2000c).

In the last three years there has been some increase in union organizing activity in union-resistant regions of the country. This has included the author’s home state of South Carolina, which is the second lowest in union

density (about 3.5 percent). Yet, as elsewhere, this has not resulted in a significant increase in union density (Thomas 2000).

Are we to conclude from this experience that organized labor is doomed to disappear, or to permanently represent only a tiny proportion of the American workforce, as some writers suggest? Why did unions decline? Is this a temporary setback from which they will recover, or a permanent shift away from collective organizations of workers? Will the American labor movement assume new forms as we move into a new century? What are the strategies and tactics that might enhance its chances for future success?

Causes of Union Decline

There are numerous explanations for how American labor came to its present low state. According to some, there has been a failure on the part of unions to expend sufficient resources on organizing new members. Some scholarly studies have identified particular tactics that seem to be more effective than others (Bronfenbrenner and Juravich 1997). Presumably, then, their failure to organize in part may be attributable to not expending sufficient effort and using the wrong tactics.

Another possible cause of union decline is increased employer opposition, along with labor laws that facilitate it (Freeman 1988). Although, as William Gould, former chair of the NLRB has argued, “the law can be a convenient scapegoat” (1993: 47), the American legal system has clearly permitted employers to vigorously oppose unions, and they have done this with devastating effects upon the labor movement. Based upon some very compelling testimony from workers and union organizers, the Federal Commission on the Future of Labor-Management Relations, or Dunlop Commission, found that the law is woefully lacking in protections for workers who wish to organize (Commission on the Future of Labor-Management Relations 1994). An international organization, Human Rights Watch, recently declared that the American legal system is so deficient as to violate the basic human rights of workers to organize and bargain collectively (Bureau of National Affairs 2000d). Indeed, one could argue that looking at union and worker actions to explain the lowering of union density in the United States is an exercise in blaming the victim. An organized attack on labor, mounted by a powerful antiunion movement in the business community and tolerated by the law, is perhaps the most parsimonious explanation of this phenomenon.

An interesting analysis by Michael Goldfield (1987) argues that labor’s decline is rooted in weaknesses that arose during its years of power (mid-1930s to mid-1950s). These include the regionalization of unions that led to national political weakness, destruction of rank-and-file democracy, bureaucratization of unions, the elimination of radical oppositions in unions, and unions becoming subordinate to the Democratic Party in politics.

Clearly, any explanation of union decline would have to include the economic environment. The transition of the American economy from being dominated by relatively highly unionized manufacturing employment to one dominated by lightly unionized service employment is important (Troy 1990, 1999). The increased diversity of the workforce has no doubt lessened the solidarity that is necessary for collective action. Also of obvious importance is the increased competitiveness of both domestic and global product markets, and the related transfer of production to overseas locations and to the nonunion southern and western regions of the United States (Edwards 1986). These factors will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. The crucial question, of course, is whether these conditions, which do not appear to be likely to change in the near future, will permanently consign organized labor to only marginal significance in the American economy and society, or leave room for the growth of a renewed and enlarged labor movement.

The Future

There is, of course, considerable disagreement about the future of the American labor movement. The arguments sound pretty much the same as they did in earlier eras. There are arguments by management groups that unions are obsolete and serve no function in a modern economy. Each generation of managers and their apologists predictably comes to the conclusion that there was some time in the distant past when unions might have been useful, but that they have been rendered useless by current conditions and enlightened managers. There are counterarguments from unionists that the employment relationship by definition requires adversarial representation of an independent worker interest in order to avoid exploitation of workers by capitalists and their representatives. These arguments, and others, make for an interesting and lively literature on the general subject of the future of unions.

The View that Unions are Dead

Perhaps the best-reasoned statement of the view that unions have virtually no favorable prospects appears in a recent book by a long-time student of trends in unionization, Leo Troy (1999). Troy argues that the collective system of worker representation has in fact already been replaced by an "individual system of employee representation" (p. 195). According to him, this is the result of a "structural transformation of the labor market" (p. 196). This occurred because of (1) the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, which gave workers the right not to belong to a union; (2) the rise of service employment; and (3) growing domestic and global competition. These conditions not only reinforced the longstanding employer aversion to unions, but also affected worker preferences. According to Troy, the end result is that unions are in a "twilight zone" from which they are not likely to emerge. They will

stay at a union density of about 9 percent as we enter the twenty-first century and will not do better than this in the foreseeable future. He sees union efforts to change this as a “hopeless task” (p. 199).

Troy believes that the individual representation system will continue to be the dominant one because it is the one preferred by both managers and employees. He cites numerous surveys of employee sentiments that show a large majority of nonunion workers saying that they would not vote for a union. NLRB election results also support this conclusion. As he argues, a number of studies show that unions are associated with lower profitability, making management opposition to unions economically rational. There is also an explicit management philosophy that validates and makes sense of the nonunion preferences of managers. Modern human-resource management provides the mechanisms that make this work, and employee handbooks provide a system of governance.

Troy explains how the individual representation system works by focusing on the role of the supervisor in it. He argues that the individual representation system can and does include complaint procedures that provide “fair dealing and due process” (p. 118). He judges the same to be true for discipline procedures. He concludes that this system is superior in many respects to the collective representation system of unions.

There is a “third way” of nonunion forms of collective representation (Kaufman and Taras 1999) that is rejected by Troy. Kaufman (2000) argues that nonunion forms of employee representation were mistakenly outlawed by the Wagner Act in 1935. He and others have argued that collective mechanisms other than unions can effectively serve the interests of workers. In recent years there has been something of a movement toward organizations that resemble the old employer-dominated “company” unions of the 1920s and 1930s. These organizations currently suffer from the legal impediment of violating Section 8 (a) (2) of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). However, Republican members of Congress have made efforts to obtain passage of legislation such as the Team Act that would open the door for company unions. When the president is a Republican their chances of success are increased. If the Team Act were to pass, the option of sham unions would be available to employers. This form of union substitution would pose a threat to the future of unions if, as was the case historically, it were to be used as a union avoidance device.

A ground for pessimism that must be taken into account is the extreme degree to which American management is willing to resist unions. It is generally believed that there was a post-World War II understanding, a “labor accord,” between unions and major corporations that unions would be tolerated by management. When the conditions that induced employers to participate in collective bargaining ended, there came a decline in their willingness to bargain with unions (Edwards and Podgursky 1986). Unions had come to have a negative effect on profitability because they needed to

provide benefits and services that workers valued, but found it difficult to do this without putting unionized employers at a disadvantage relative to nonunion competitors (Hirsch 1991). This effect may have been exacerbated by the increased bargaining strength of unions in the highly capital-intensive, automated world of the modern factory, particularly those utilizing just-in-time inventory. In this setting the costs of strikes to employers are especially high (Poole 1981).

One is compelled to conclude that there is reason for unions to be concerned about the accuracy of the doomsayers' predictions for organized labor's future. Troy claims, paraphrasing a well-known political expression, that "It's the numbers, stupid" (Troy 1999: 199). The quantitative evidence shows that there is indeed a very steep mountain for unions to climb in order to regain the strength that they had at their height. As Troy argues, in order to regain their peak density of over 30 percent, they would need to hold on to their present membership and organize another twenty-five million new members. He asks whether anything similar to this result is likely to happen in the foreseeable future.

The View that the Unions will Rise Again

There has been no lack of writers willing to argue that unions will once again rise to a position of power and influence in American life. They base this conclusion on a wide variety of arguments.

Longstanding Arguments. To start with, it is clear that the situation of being in a weak position is not a new one for organized labor. Union declines have often prompted scholars to address the question of whether unions were dead. In the nineteenth century Richard T. Ely observed:

A reaction appears to have set in, and it is probable that for some time the power of organized labor will decrease; but a change will again come, and the unions and various associations will once more report an increasing membership. The progress of the labor movement may be compared to the incoming tide. Each wave advances a little further than the previous one; and he is the merest tyro in social science, and an ignoramus in the history of his country, who imagines that a permanent decline has overtaken organized labor (Ely 1886: 90).

Writing a century later, historian David Montgomery (1987) agrees with Ely. According to Montgomery, the story of American labor has never been one of either a "progressive ascent from oppression to securely established rights," or of being "irretrievably snuffed out by the consolidation of modern capitalism" (p. 7). Instead, its growth has been interrupted just when it seemed to be on the verge of permanent victory, and it has revived just when it seemed about to be overwhelmed by its enemies. According to him:

The taproot of its resilience has been the workers' daily experience and the solidarities nurtured by that experience, which have at best encompassed a lush variety of beliefs, loyalties, and activities within a common commitment to democratic direction of the country's economic and political life (p. 8).

Ely explains the ebb and flow of union membership as resulting from workers deserting unions during hard times, but then, when circumstances are more favorable, pouring back into the unions (Ely 1886). Montgomery (1980) argues that the social relations of production, while often changing over the last 150 years, have remained within boundaries that delineate "industrial capitalism" (p. 486). During this epoch, both technical knowledge and the power to make decisions have been systematically and increasingly monopolized by managers. Also, the decisions by management regarding production have remained based on the corporation's need for profit, not what is best for the community. Workers have had no choice but to submit to this arrangement as a price for being paid their wages.

Yet, we may now be in a unique time. Some observers believe that we are experiencing a sea change in the world of work that has changed workers' daily experiences; one that is comparable in magnitude to the shifting of the Western economies from farm to factory in the early twentieth century (Leone 1993; Thurow 1996). These forces are described in some detail in Chapter 2. They include the rise of the service sector; a highly disturbed global economy; and broad advances in technology, communications, and transportation.

With respect to this "postmodern" situation, a British scholar, John Kelly (1998), has delivered a penetrating critique of writings by economists and others who argue that there has been a shift in both the world and national economies and societies that necessarily dooms the labor movement. Kelly maintains that, "Contrary to postmodernist claims that the classical labour movement is in terminal decline, long wave theory suggests that it is more likely to be on the threshold of resurgence" (1998: 1). His prediction is that "the long period of employer and state counter-mobilization will not last. As the next long economic upswing gathers momentum then so too should the organization and mobilization of workers across the capitalist world" (p. 130).

Current Arguments. Not surprisingly, labor and its friends believe the current setbacks to be temporary, as Richard Ely and David Montgomery have argued was the case in the past. Douglas Fraser, former president of the United Automobile Workers (UAW), says,

In every single democracy in the world you will find a vibrant, vital labor movement. The reason is that in a democratic society, where you have a system of checks and balances, a labor movement is absolutely indispensable. . . . There will always be unions as long as there are bosses (quoted in Shostak 1991: 1).

Like Douglas Fraser, Shostak (1994) finds his hopes upon the necessity for society to have a counterweight to businesses' preference for following the market without regard to human costs. Tom Geoghegan, author of the challenging book, *Which Side Are You On? Trying to Be for Labor When It's Flat on Its Back* (1991), puts the case this way:

For twenty years we have tried to do without unions. And we can't. We can cry. We can curse. We can try out New Paradigms. And read books by New Democrats. But in the end it will do no good (Geoghegan 1994: 30).

Is there hope that the sea will indeed change so that it is once again favorable to unions? David Bonior, a Democratic congressman friendly to labor, says:

If you can show them [workers] that they can have the power to control their lives, that they can have a larger voice, and that, working together, people can make a difference, then that's it – end of story. You will unleash a power greater than any you could ever imagine. The labor movement can fulfill that role (Bonior 1997: 94).

John Sweeney, former president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and now president of the AFL-CIO, exudes feelings of confidence and optimism about the labor movement's future. He is justifiably proud of his union's successes in organizing, and also recruiting successes across the American labor movement since he came to lead the federation. His theme of unions as "organizing organizations" has taken root, and is reflected in the actions of many unions. Nevertheless, he recognizes that, even in a year when labor is able to organize several hundreds of thousands of new workers, it can still fall behind the growth in the labor force (Swoboda 1997). Another prominent labor leader, Stephen Yokich, president of the UAW, argues that the current "shut up and settle for less" attitude of management will not be tolerated by workers, who will organize as a response to it (Yokich 1998).

Popular newspaper columnist David Broder has written optimistically about labor's future. He sees a ray of hope for unions in a significant victory among 74,000 home health-care workers in Los Angeles in 1999, and in the creative style of union leaders involved in this campaign – what he calls a "new unionism" that was involved in that victory. According to him, that success was based upon a new commitment to organization, outreach to immigrants, and alliances with a Republican governor and a Roman Catholic cardinal (Broder 2000).

Official documents of the American labor movement provide some important insights into the thinking of labor leaders about the future of the movement. One of the more interesting ones produced in recent years is *The New American Workplace: A Labor Perspective*, produced by the AFL-CIO Committee on the Evolution of Work and approved by the Executive Council

of the AFL-CIO in 1994. This forward-looking report claims a place for labor in the new participative workplace, saying,

The moment has come for unions to insist upon the right of workers to participate in shaping the work system under which they labor and to participate in the decisions that affect their working lives. Unions have an equally important role to play in assuring that workplace change plants strong roots. Unions provide a check on managers and owners who waver in their commitment to the new work order or who seek to revert to old ways (AFL-CIO 1994: 14).

In a report by the SEIU Committee on the Future, *Directions for a 21st Century Union* (SEIU undated), John Sweeney's home union declares that in order to succeed the union must "offer a compelling vision of change . . . project that vision forcefully and creatively . . . give workers a reason to join us in our struggles . . . [and] show workers that together, through their union, they can improve their own lives and help build a more just and equitable world" (p. 30).

These broad visions of the labor movement's functions are quite compelling. However, they may at least implicitly run afoul of the historical experience of unions in American society. That experience would seem to indicate that labor should tend to its knitting – deliver the bread and butter that workers want.

The basic logic of unions as collective-bargaining institutions remains a very powerful rationale for traditional American unionism. As Sidney and Beatrice Webb described it long ago, this logic has to do with substituting the stronger collective will of a number of workers for the weakness of the individual worker (Webb and Webb 1911). Both the work of the SEIU Committee on the Future and a relatively recent (1992) comprehensive survey of trade unionist and worker preferences show that they want from their union "a good contract; enforcement of the contract; and, the ability to keep their job long enough to collect on the contract" (Wilson Center for Public Research 1992: 2). Clearly, as indicated by David Montgomery's observations on the history of the American labor movement, the future of the labor movement must be rooted in the daily experiences and needs of workers. Reflecting these experiences and needs is what gives it enduring value.

Selig Perlman (1949) argued that unions should base their behavior on the psychology of workers (what he called "scarcity consciousness"), rather than the ideas of "intellectuals" about what workers *should* want. Perlman's "scarcity consciousness" may or may not reflect the psychology of modern workers. However, his fundamental insight – that unions must reflect the needs and be an organic creation by workers – is one of which labor needs to be constantly mindful.

Although the American legal system has largely failed to "encourage the practice and procedure of collective bargaining," one of the stated purposes of the NLRA, it is capable of responding somewhat to the needs of unions.

Since the appointment of members to the NLRB by President Clinton, there have been some improvements in the law from the perspective of unions. This has mainly occurred through changes in the effectiveness of the processes of the law during this period. More recently, however, there have been some breakthroughs in the substance of the law. Perhaps the most important of these is a recent NLRB decision (*M. C. Sturgis Inc.* 2000) holding that “supplied,” that is temporary, workers can vote in the same election unit as permanent employees without this requiring the consent of both the temp agency and its client. This could significantly increase the chances of unions organizing these workers.

In sum, we see some general agreement in the literature about the situation in which the American labor movement finds itself. As to how it got there, there is less agreement. As to its prospects, we find pessimism among some scholars, as well as among organized labor’s historic enemies. To the contrary, we find optimism among labor’s officials and union-friendly scholars.

There are really two main questions about the future of the American labor movement. The first is whether it will be strong or weak. The second is what forms it will take. It seems to this writer that these questions are inter-related. That is, whether it will be strong or weak depends upon whether there are forms that, if adopted, would lead to a strong labor movement. It also depends on the likelihood that the labor movement will adopt those forms and strategies that have the potential to lead it to a position of strength.

One approach to the question of what forms it will take is to identify, analyze, and evaluate current union strategies. It is believed that the fundamentally pragmatic nature of American unions (Taft 1964) will lead them to adopt the forms and strategies that prove to work out in practice. It is expected, then, that those forms and strategies that meet this test will continue to be utilized, and the future American labor movement will be shaped accordingly.

This presupposes that the American labor movement will experiment with various approaches in the first place. This is not very difficult to conclude. Even a casual observation of their behavior in the past decade or so indicates pretty clearly that American unions (as well as those in Western Europe) are quite innovative and will try out nearly anything that has a chance of being successful. This is aided considerably by the end of the Cold War and its attendant biases, which had caused traditional American unions to avoid anything that might have the slightest chance of forcing them to carry what has been called the “burden of socialism.”

In the chapters that follow, labor movement strategies and tactics in both the United States and Western Europe will be identified, analyzed, and evaluated with reference to their potential for strengthening the American labor movement. At the end of the day, it is believed that we will find some promising avenues to a successful future for American labor.

However, before we look at the strategies and forms of the American labor movement it is necessary to consider the current environment of U.S. indus-

trial relations. This environment poses both problems and opportunities for labor. Any analysis and evaluation of present or future strategies and forms must take environmental factors into account. This is a particularly compelling requirement in a time of great change in the environment. One of the fundamental questions with which this book must grapple is whether the ground upon which labor movements are built has changed so greatly that certain, or even all, forms of a labor movement have been rendered obsolete. Trade unions have conventionally, and correctly, been viewed as being primarily a protective response to environmental realities and management policies that are largely beyond their control (Barbash 1984). As Montgomery (1980) argues, it is the conditions of work and the workplace experience of workers that have allowed unions to rise again and again from the ashes of apparent defeat. But what if those conditions have changed so much that unions are no longer an appropriate response to workers' experience or, as is more likely, to make certain forms and strategies obsolete and others newly promising?

The phenomena observed and analyzed in this book are at several levels. First, there is the level of the current general economic, political, and social environment over which labor movements have little or no control. Forces such as globalization that are part of this environment generate tensions and contradictions to which trade unions and their allies must respond. Second, there are specific conditions, such as government support for unions, that enable the existence of a strong labor movement, over which labor may have some influence. Just like the forces in the general environment, these do not directly determine the strength of a labor movement. Unlike general environmental conditions they are susceptible to union power. Therefore it makes sense for union strategies and tactics to aim at changing these conditions to make them more favorable to unions. They influence the chances of more direct actions being successful. Third, there are the actions by labor, for example energetically organizing new members, that are under their control and also directly produce a stronger labor movement.

In the balance of this chapter, we will take a brief look at the general environmental conditions (these will be discussed in some depth in Chapter 2). This will be followed by a description of the enabling conditions. The enabling conditions constitute the first of two analytical frameworks that will be utilized to understand, analyze, and evaluate various labor movement forms, strategies, and tactics. Last, the second of these analytical frameworks – ideal types of unions – will be described.

A GLANCE AT THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

As was true at the beginning of the twentieth century, early in the twenty-first century the environment of employment relations is in a state of considerable change. In the United States we have witnessed the rise of competitive pressures on business to heights that are unprecedented in the

twentieth century. International competition, deregulation, and the demands of the stock market for ever-increasing profits have all caused managers to cut labor costs, increase flexibility, and seek new ways to provide quality products at low prices (Capelli et al. 1997).

One effect of the new competitiveness is the focus on product quality and the resultant development of new forms of work organization. This is the well-publicized movement to teams and other participative mechanisms – what has been called the “new human resource technologies.” What they have in common is that they attempt to extract from the employee the largest possible amount of knowledge, commitment, and energy, and in the process give individual employees increased influence over the processes of work (Appelbaum and Batt 1994; Cappelli et al. 1997).

The drive for flexibility and cost cutting has led to an increased casualization of labor. Involuntary part-time work has been on the increase. There has been an increase in temporary work. Contracting out work to owner-operators (independent contractors) instead of having it done within the employment relationship has also been on the rise (Commission on the Future of Labor-Management Relations 1994). Rather than cut wages for existing employees, firms cut their wage bill by contracting out work to other employers who pay low wages (Klaas and Ullman 1995). If capitalists organizing workers into armies for purposes of production created the conditions for these workers to organize for their own purposes (Marx and Engels 1848), the dispersal of these armies may have destroyed those conditions.

Another phenomenon that is of considerable importance for unions is the increasing diversity of the workforce. Workforce participation by women continues to rise. The workforce is increasingly non-White, with Hispanic workers growing as a proportion of the workforce. The proportion of foreign-born workers is high by recent historical standards and is expected to grow. The difficulty of building solidarity among such a diverse group of workers is apparent.

The New Deal model of industrial unionism was born and prospered under some very special conditions: (1) oligopoly in many product markets, with limited competition; (2) routinized work within narrow and unchanging job classifications; (3) full-time, permanent jobs (Osterman 1994); and (4) a relatively homogeneous workforce – largely male, semiskilled or unskilled, and with an historically high proportion of native-born workers. These conditions have largely evaporated.

Whatever particular causes one selects as accounting for the decline of American unions over the last several decades – employer hostility; changing industrial and geographic mix; unions failing to expend resources on organizing, etc. (Edwards 1986; Goldfield 1987; Freeman 1988; Troy 1990) – it would seem that part of the problem may be that the very ground upon which unions are based, the daily experiences of workers (Montgomery 1987), has shifted and a new set of circumstances has come into being.

To add to the problems of labor, particularly in organizing new members, the new, competitive, global economy has produced an American economy of both high employment and low inflation. What has been called the “great American job machine” has become the envy of the world. This experience supports the ideology of unregulated labor markets, which is popularly viewed as having helped to produce this result. As trade unions by definition attempt to moderate the effects of pure, unregulated markets, they contradict this ideology and may be seen as threatening this beneficial result. It may take a failure of this system such as the Great Depression to produce an intellectual environment conducive to collective worker organization. However, even without a system failure, there would seem to be ample room for criticizing the results and challenging the ideology.

In spite of the fact that the American economy is in a period of unparalleled growth, creating jobs and wealth at a virtually unprecedented rate, there is a “Great Divide” between the winners and losers in the new economy (Reich 2000). The economic expansion, for all its successes, has clearly left behind the working poor. Along with more wealthy persons than ever before, there has been an increase in the numbers (about five million people) and percentage (about 3 percent) of Americans whose incomes are below the poverty line (Bureau of National Affairs 2000a). Workers in such occupations as janitor, nursing-home worker, home health-care aide, and hospital orderly are making less in real terms than they were fifteen years ago (Reich 2000). Especially vulnerable are part-time and contingent workers. Part-time workers earn approximately half the total compensation of full-time workers. Average total compensation for unionized workers remains significantly greater than for nonunionized workers – \$25.88 per hour compared to \$19.07 per hour (Bureau of National Affairs 2000b). At least on its face, all of this would seem to suggest both a problem and a solution. The problem is an economically deprived economic class. At least one obvious solution is unionization.

Given these circumstances, which we will consider in greater depth in Chapter 2, what form of labor movement stands the greatest chance of success? That is, what form is most likely to create or support the conditions necessary for the survival and prospering of a labor movement? What form is most compatible with these environmental conditions?

FRAMEWORKS FOR ANALYSIS

This book will utilize two frameworks for understanding, analyzing, and evaluating union strategies and tactics. The first is a set of conditions that are believed to facilitate the existence of a strong labor movement – termed *enabling conditions*. As noted previously, these conditions are to some degree susceptible to union influence and are therefore useful targets for union strategy and tactics. The second framework is a taxonomy of ideal union types.

The set of enabling conditions is for testing the usefulness of the strategies and tactics, it being believed that strategies and tactics that contribute to the existence of these conditions are more likely to lead to a stronger labor movement than those that do not. Focusing on this set of indirect influences on labor-movement strengths provides a different and more complex perspective than limiting one's inquiry to the much-studied (see Wheeler and McClendon 1991) union actions to directly increase union membership. The taxonomy of ideal union types is intended to provide an understanding of the fundamental nature of various union strategies and tactics. This should also assist in our analysis.

The Enabling Conditions

What are the conditions subject to labor's influence that enable the existence of a strong labor movement? To begin with, we must ask what we are talking about when we speak of a labor movement. We can then systematically inquire as to what conditions enable it to be successful.

It is important to recognize that a labor movement consists of more than just labor unions. A labor movement can be defined as a set of institutions and persons that performs the function of advancing the interests of workers. In modern economies a worker is usually defined as a person who meets the common-law definition of *employee* (or the older term, *servant*). That is, someone else – an *employer* (or the older term, *master*) – has the right to control the manner in which the employee performs his or her work. In exchange, the employee is compensated financially (Commons 1968). This role differs from that of nonemployees who are paid to do work, primarily in that nonemployee “independent contractors” retain control of how their work is to be done. The idea of a labor movement is founded on the assumption that persons who occupy the role of worker have interests in common that are separate from, and may be at odds with, those of persons who act in other roles.

Labor movements have various components. Although in the United States it is customary to take only labor unions into account, even here there are other parts of a labor movement that are worth considering. These components include informal rank-and-file worker groups; worker organizations other than unions (both extraunion organizations such as the Carolina Alliance for Fair Employment [CAFE] and intraunion ones such as the Teamsters for a Democratic Union); political parties and politicians; and labor intellectuals. What counts is whether *some* component of a labor movement is capable of creating sufficient levels of the enabling conditions. As will be argued in Chapter 9, it would help if these components were organized in some systematic fashion.

For a labor movement, as we have defined it, to prosper in a society it must include these enabling conditions: (1) *workers perceptions that the work role*

is important to their lives; (2) solidarity among workers; (3) workers perceptions that there are distinctive worker interests; (4) the benefits of collective action at least equaling the costs; (5) employer opposition being held within tolerable boundaries; and (6) government support, or at least tolerance (see Barbash 1984; Wheeler 1985).

For any movement to come into being and endure, the phenomena upon which it focuses must be salient to its potential members. If work is not an important activity in a society it is unlikely that human beings in the role of worker will take the trouble to organize a movement around its concerns. Workers should be more susceptible to unionization to the degree that they see the work role as central to their lives.

Labor movements are fundamentally social and collective in nature. They depend upon workers being willing to take risks and make sacrifices for the common good of members of some group with which they identify. Persons without feelings of affection or brotherhood for one another make poor candidates for participants in any social movement. Because it is work concerns to which labor movements relate, the human beings in that role must have feelings of some common bonds relating to work in order to form and participate in a social movement of this type. Solidarity, it should be noted, has two faces. There is the inward-looking face toward one's brothers and sisters – "us." There is also the outward-looking face toward an outgroup of supervisors, managers, or owners – "them" (see McClendon, Wheeler, and Weikle 1998).

The necessity for a perception of distinctive worker interests flows naturally from the requirement of solidarity. It must be possible to identify the "us" and the "them." That is, there must be salient differences between these groups for a movement of one of them to make any sense.

Assuming some degree of rationality in human behavior, it is important for workers to believe that the costs of collective action do not exceed its benefits. It is believed that humans are predisposed toward collective action and find it intrinsically fulfilling and satisfying. This is rooted in the basic inclinations of human beings as social animals (Midgley 1978). Therefore, it is not necessary for collective action to produce a more favorable result than individual action. However, if it has significantly greater costs or fewer benefits, it cannot be expected to appeal to most of us.

Affecting the costs and benefits of collective action very significantly are the attitudes of the owners of capital and their agents (professional managers) toward it. Especially under modern conditions, capital is extremely powerful. Therefore, a labor movement that cannot somehow gain at least a grudging acceptance on the part of capital is likely to be doomed to failure.

Government is another major player in the industrial relations system. Its support, or at least tolerance, would seem to be necessary for the survival of a labor movement (Masters 1997). This is especially true where capital has great power, as it does in all modern postindustrial societies. Government is

the only source of power in a union's environment that has the muscle to effectively aid it in its struggle with the forces of capital. It is a necessary ally.

For the most part, the enabling condition approach, and the conditions themselves, can be solidly grounded in industrial relations theory. Although this writer's own theoretical approach, labeled as the "integrative theory of industrial conflict" (Wheeler 1985; Wheeler and McClendon 1991), deals primarily with the processes by which workers form and join unions, this framework is of utility in thinking about enabling conditions. It starts out with deprivation leading to three possible paths to individuals supporting a union. If the deprivation is caused by the employer taking away existing rights or interests, the employee may move to an immediate readiness to take some action against the employer. If the deprivation arises from a gap coming to be perceived between the worker's achievements and expectations, and the worker is blocked (frustrated) in the attempt to close this gap, the worker will be ready to take action. With or without a deprivation, a worker may rationally calculate that it would be beneficial to take collective action, and thereby become ready to act.

In the Wheeler formulation, whether this action takes the form of unionization or other collective action depends on the presence of certain facilitating conditions and the absence of certain inhibiting conditions. The facilitating conditions are love, hope, and saliency. That is, they include solidarity among workers and a lack of identification with the employer; perceptions that the collective action will be instrumental in achieving the worker's expectations; and the idea of this collective action being made salient by leaders or particular events. The inhibiting conditions include a fear of punishment for taking collective action and a belief that unions are wrong. This theory has been tested empirically (Wheeler, McClendon, and Weikle 1994; Weikle, Wheeler, and McClendon 1998; McClendon, Wheeler, and Weikle 1998) with some success.

Some theorizing by John Kelly (1998) posits a useful framework for analyzing the environment in terms of its favorableness to unions. It is based upon mobilization theory and long-wave theory. Kelly posits deprivation, deriving from exploitation, as leading to collective worker action whenever the conditions are ripe. Although significantly differing in some fundamentals, Kelly's rethinking of industrial relations is similar in a number of respects to the Wheeler integrative theory of industrial conflict. The chief difference is that the Wheeler theory of industrial conflict has its "starter" in a particular view of human nature (which Kelly would no doubt reject), while Kelly's is founded on a Marxist analysis of exploitation of workers under capitalism. Both theories identify deprivation as a condition that may lead workers to form collective organizations, although they differ as to the source of the deprivation. Both consider worker deprivation to be a common condition.

In support of our enabling conditions, both the mobilization theory as articulated by Kelly (1998) and the integrative theory model of Wheeler

(1985) posit solidarity among workers and the workers perceptions that their interests are different from those of employers – the necessary “us” and “them.” Both involve calculations of the costs and benefits of collective action. Both emphasize the importance of the employer’s policies and actions to the occurrence of collective action by workers. Both recognize the importance of the role of government.

For the purposes of this book, the crucial point made by Kelly in his mobilization theory analysis is that exploitation is constantly present, and that differences in worker militancy and collective action can be explained in large part by differences in the various kinds of resources that they can mobilize to respond to this exploitation. These resources include worker perceptions of solidarity versus with their employers; the instrumentality of union organizing; oppression (or lack of it) by employers; and government repression or support.

The framework utilized in this book takes the view that *a labor movement is likely to be strong where the enabling conditions are favorable*. To the extent that a particular form of labor movement contributes to or reinforces these conditions, it improves its chances of success. Of course, some of these conditions are more readily amenable to labor’s influence than others. While, for example, affecting employer opposition might be readily achieved by donning the mantle of more cooperative unionism, it might be well nigh impossible to affect strongly held worker perceptions that work is not central to their lives. However, it is believed that, unlike general environmental conditions, all of these conditions are at least to some degree susceptible to labor’s influence.

Taxonomy of Ideal Types of Unions

One approach to considering a set of alternative strategies for the labor movement is to think in terms of ideal types of unionism. While this involves a high degree of simplification, it permits us to observe distinctive strategic thrusts more clearly than do more realistic, and therefore more complex, depictions of labor organization and structure.

The Logic of Ideal Types. The classification scheme utilized here is constructed on a functional basis. That is, it types union strategies by looking at the functions performed rather than on the more usual basis—structure (craft, industrial, etc.). This follows Hoxie (1921) in looking at “fairly distinct alternative forms of union action” that can serve “as guides to the essential character” of the organizations studied (p. 45). These types represent fundamentally different logics of unionism. Breaking them down into types is a statement that unions “from the practical standpoint cannot be interpreted, evaluated, and judged as a simple consistent whole, or as a succession of more or less accidental and temporary variations from a single normal type” (Hoxie 1921: 54).

The reasoning underlying Richard Hyman's much more recent (1996) classification of European trade unions is similar to Hoxie's. Hyman (1996) created categories called trade union "identities" (p. 63) that classify ideal types of unions on the basis of the key function and focus of union strategies. In a 2001 analysis of European trade unions, Hyman (2001) uses a somewhat different set of ideal types, "each of which is associated with a distinctive ideological orientation" (p. 1). Hyman (2001) agrees with Hoxie that there is no single agreed-upon definition of trade unions, arguing that "the meaning of trade unionism has historically been bitterly contested and today . . . is a subject of doubt and disputation" (p. 165).

The Ideal Types. The ideal types of American unions identified in this book are: Pure and Simple Unionism, Militant Radical Unionism, Cooperationist Unionism, Social Democratic Unionism, and Reformist Unionism. Hoxie's types are labeled: "Business Unionism," "Uplift Unionism," "Revolutionary Unionism," and "Predatory Unionism" (1921: xvii). In 1996, Hyman adopts the categories of: "Guild," "Friendly Society," "Company Union," "Social Partner," and "Social Movement" (p. 70). In 2001, Hyman identifies three types of European unions: "business unionism," "social-democratic unionism," and "anti-capitalist opposition" (pp. 2-3).

As Hyman explains his 2001 version of ideal types: "first, unions are interest organizations with predominantly labour market functions; . . . second, vehicles for raising workers' status in society more generally and hence advancing social justice; . . . third, 'schools of war' in a struggle between labour and capital" (pp. 1-2). The first of these describes "business unionism," the second "trade unionism as a vehicle for social integration" that has as a "priority . . . gradual improvement in social welfare and social cohesion"; and the third "a form of anti-capitalist opposition" with "a priority for militancy and socio-political mobilization . . . to advance class interests" (pp. 2-3). These obviously match up pretty well with our categories of Pure and Simple Unionism, Social Democratic Unionism, and Militant Radical Unionism (the last two being more important in Europe than in the United States).

Hyman considers his three ideal types to make up a triangle, with the focus of each type being on a different point of this geometric representation of labor strategies. He sees the focus of business unionism as being the market, social democratic unionism as focusing on society, and anticapitalist opposition unions as focusing on class. Hyman argues that "a body resting on a single point is unstable" (p. 4). Accordingly, ideal types in their pure forms (confined to a single point) are quite rare, if they exist at all. According to Hyman, "in most cases, actually existing unions have tended to incline towards an often contradictory admixture of the three ideal types" (p. 4).

As with Hoxie's functional types, the ideal types used in this book "do not represent exactly and exclusively the ideas and activities of any particular union organization or group" (Hoxie 1921: 45). Instead, they are a mecha-

nism to assist us in recognizing various broad approaches that differ significantly. As Hyman says, “Ideal types are not the same as empirical instances; no trade union movement can fully assume any of the identities outlined. What is at issue is a question of priorities and strategic choices . . .” (Hyman 1996: 72). For example, a union that is predominately Pure and Simple would be classified as such. If such a union adopted a Cooperationist strategy such as labor-management “partnership” its leaders should recognize that it is pursuing a different logic that may be in conflict with its basic strategic orientation.

Pure and Simple Unionism. One ideal type is unions as they historically have been in the United States. These organizations aim to serve the economic and human dignity needs of their members that arise from work. Their concern is chiefly with the welfare of their members rather than of the working class or society as a whole. They have a strategic orientation that is fundamentally economic, relying upon collective bargaining backed by strike power to achieve their goals. The goals are largely bread and butter. Political action is engaged in, but has as its principal aim the strengthening of collective bargaining. These unions are “organic” worker organizations, deriving their direction from the expressed desires of their members who tend to be mainly oriented toward job-related outcomes. The underlying theory is one of advocacy of employee interests. These are believed to be fundamentally opposed to employer interests, leading to a mainly adversarial posture. There is an acceptance of the capitalist system and of a range of authority and discretion for management within the firm. The term *pure and simple unionism* was apparently coined by Samuel Gompers, the father of the American labor movement. He argued that such unions were the “natural organizations of workers” (Gompers 1919: 3).

In the typology posited by Robert Hoxie (1921) this would be “Business Unionism.” Another common label is “Bread and Butter Unionism,” used because of the emphasis on the practical needs of its members. Under Hyman’s ideal types these would be classified as “Guilds” (1996) or “business” (2001) unions, which are “interest organizations with predominantly labor market functions” (2000: 1).

Examples of this type of union include nearly all current American unions – UAW, Teamsters, United Food and Commercial Workers, Service Employees International Union, etc., although most of them would tend to view themselves somewhat more broadly. Examples of Pure and Simple strategies include collective bargaining and striking against particular employers for the purpose of improving pay, benefits, or job security. Also included are strategies and tactics explicitly aimed at the survival and welfare of the union as a going concern – as a business. Obviously, many things that unions do have effects on the welfare of the organization. What makes Pure and Simple union strategies distinctive is their focus on the financial and

membership base for the survival and growth of the union as an institution or business.

Pure and Simple unions may also have the characteristics of Hyman's (1996) Friendly Societies, providing mutual insurance for their members. Hyman (2001) cites the providing of inexpensive holidays and insurance, as well as financial services and advice by British unions in the 1990s as examples of a return to the early forms of craft unionism (p. 108), that is Pure and Simple.

Militant Radical Unionism. Another future is that of a form of unionism that is a militant movement for radical protest against existing economic and political institutions. At its core is a cry of the heart against the evils of the system. It aims at drastic change in the society as a whole, and sees ameliorative actions by unions to achieve better conditions of work as being useless at best. The strategy is to bring down exploitative and oppressive structures so that better ones can be erected. This is to be achieved by social protest, political action, and general strikes. Organizationally it might involve one big union uniting all workers or highly fragmented groups of workers acting independently and spontaneously. The philosophical base might be in anarchism or Marxism. In the more spontaneous forms, there might not be any particular philosophical base.

The prime example of this form of unionism in the United States is the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). However, this type of labor movement is not necessarily limited to the IWW model or even anarchist or Marxist movements. It can exist wherever workers rise in protest to oppressive conditions, whether or not a broad philosophy is involved. The old machine-smashing British Luddites are an example of this.

This is a labor movement that is essentially protest. It rejects, or at least does not consider as a salient alternative, a continuing routinized relationship with employers such as exists under collective bargaining. Instead it aims to lash out at employers, either simply out of anger or with the idea of eliminating the employer altogether and changing society. In Hoxie's (1921) typology, this would be Revolutionary Unionism, encompassing both its revolutionary and socialist forms. This fits Hyman's (2001) category of anti-capitalist opposition unionism. He describes these as "'schools for war' in a struggle between labor and capital," that are "a form of anti-capitalist opposition" with "a priority for militancy and socio-political mobilization . . . to advance class interests" (p. 2).

There are few examples of Militant Radical Unionism in the United States and Western Europe at present. "Wildcat" strikes (strikes not authorized by the union) in the United States and other countries are often a cry of the heart. These have occurred from time to time in coal mining in West Virginia in the United States, and in this same industry in the United Kingdom and other countries. Some of the spontaneous strikes that are characteristic of