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Violence in American Labor Disputes

By PHILIP TAFT

ABSTRACT: Although most strikes in the United States have been peaceful, differences over the terms of employment have on occasion generated violent clashes. In cases where the union is recognized, strikes seldom lead to violent encounters. However, in unorganized strikes or in those which have arisen in an effort to gain recognition, the use of violence is more common. In the past, the presence of strike guards and private detectives were frequently causes of violent encounters. It appears that many industries were sometimes affected, and no region escaped from occasional violent incidents arising during a labor dispute. Nor were participants members of particular ethnic groups. Native Americans as well as foreigners and Negroes as well as whites were involved in bitter clashes that erupted in American industry. Violence has not been fully eliminated from American labor disputes, but considering the number of strikes and the number of employers directed to deal with unions by government boards dealing with labor relations, one has to conclude that it has been diminished. Laws requiring employers to recognize unions representing their employees in a proper bargaining unit have perhaps been the primary cause for a lessening of violence in labor disputes.

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IT may appear anomalous that the United States, a country in which class feeling and class ideology are almost entirely absent, has experienced a considerable amount of violence in labor disputes. With the exception of a small minority, American workers have not been attracted to the various brands of anarchism, communism, socialism, and syndicalism. Yet American history is dotted with clashes between strikers and strikebreakers and police authorities. On occasion, local officials have had to call upon state troops for assistance and, more rarely, for aid from the federal government.

FIRST LARGE-SCALE VIOLENCE

Although violence in labor disputes is more common in the United States than in any other industrial nation, it is by no means the normal accompaniment of labor-management differences. The appearance of violence on any scale in labor disputes has always been unusual, and it is therefore necessary to try to determine under what conditions clashes between strikers and strikebreakers, the police, and even state troops may take place. In examining only some of the controversies which generated large-scale clashes between strikers and their sympathizers and replacements or the police or private guards, it becomes clear that violent encounters may arise in different industries and under diverse circumstances. The one common factor appears to be the attempt of one of the parties to change fundamentally the terms of employment and the resistance by the other. Moreover, such encounters frequently arise when a serious sense of grievance exists among the group directly affected by the changes, or among the community at large, or in both.

It is true that frontier labor disputes took on, at times, a ferocity and ruthlessness bordering on open warfare, but

the railroad riots and strikes of 1877, which affected mostly the industrial centers and cities of the East, have never been equalled for their violence and destructiveness. The first of a series of violent encounters followed the announcement of a wage cut by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in July 1877. A group of railroadmen at Martinsburg, West Virginia, refused to continue work, and the efforts to replace strikers led to armed resistance which the local and state authorities could not suppress. Rioting spread to Baltimore, Maryland, and United States troops were called to restore peace at both points. Even worse rioting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, followed the attempt of the Pennsylvania Railroad to introduce double-header trains. A number of other communities were similarly affected, and the estimates of more than one hundred dead in the rioting indicate the nature and the magnitude of the conflict. It is difficult to allocate with any degree of exactness the causes of this revolt, but it would appear that the long depression of the 1870's accompanied by widespread idleness and privation, was the dominant cause. As noted by the committee appointed by the Pennsylvania legislature to investigate the causes of the bloody riots in Pittsburgh and other Pennsylvania cities, each strike on the railroads

was independent of those on other roads, each having a local cause particularly its own There was a sort of epidemic of strikes running through the laboring classes of the country, more particularly those in the employ of large corporations, caused by the great depression of business which followed the panic of 1873, by means of whereof many men were thrown out of work, and the wages of those who could get work were reduced.¹

¹ *Report of the Committee to Investigate the Railroad Riots in July 1877* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Land and Hart, State Printers, 1878), pp. 39-46.

VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTHWEST

The railroad riots were a spontaneous reaction to changes in the terms of employment, but the violence in the 1886 strike on the Missouri Pacific Railroad followed a walkout of shopmen who were members of the Knights of Labor. Pickets interfered with the operations of trains and sought to remove those who chose to work. Deputy sheriffs, United States marshals, and, in some places, the state militia were mustered to protect the right of way and the moving trains. In East St. Louis, Illinois, the attempt of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad to operate led to a clash in which six men and one woman were killed and one man, seriously wounded. Order was restored by the state militia sent by the governor in answer to a plea by local officers.

In this instance, the belief was widespread that the southwestern railroads had undertaken a campaign to eliminate the Knights of Labor from their properties, and the strikers and those who shared their views were determined to prevent the replacement of strikers. The shopmen in the Southwest had established assemblies affiliated with the Knights of Labor after the carriers had sought to reduce wages in 1885. A successful strike led to the rescinding of the wage reduction, and the men now believed that their wages and working conditions were imperiled. The belief of the striking shopmen that the railroad carriers were determined to destroy their District Assembly No. 101 was, according to the Congressional committee investigating the dispute, the chief cause of the bitter resentment and resistance.

PRIVATE GUARDS

Utilization of armed guards by employers, as in the steel strike at Home-

stead, Pennsylvania, has, in the past, been a frequent cause of violence. The conviction that the management of the Carnegie Steel Company was seeking to undermine a union with which the company had bargained for a number of years, a conviction strengthened by the secret importation of armed guards, appears to have been the principal cause for the armed conflict between strikers and imported Pinkerton operatives at Homestead, Pennsylvania, in 1892. The guards who attempted to disembark from the barges secretly brought to the company properties were met by masses of strikers and their friends. It was the opinion of a committee of the United States House of Representatives "that the employment of private armed guards at Homestead was unnecessary." While critical of the violent reaction of the strikers, the committee believed that the bringing of outside guards "greatly excited the populace, called to the scene thousands of men from other localities, and doubtless led to many excesses which followed."

The Pullman shop strike (1894) which led to a sympathy strike by members of the American Railway Union, whose members refused to handle the rolling stock of the company, was one of the most violent of all time. Coming in the midst of a severe depression, the refusal of the company to consider the rescinding of a wage cut and its unreserved refusal to deal with the newly formed union were the basic causes of the violence which followed. The company resisted the demand for union recognition, and the workers were determined to compel the company to yield. Attempts to replace the discharged strikers were the principal reason for the disturbances which the company sought to repress by the use of private guards and United States marshals. It then appealed to the federal courts. Both the National Guard and federal

soldiers were used to restore order in Chicago, Illinois, and Hammond, Indiana, and federal troops or the state militia were used to suppress violence arising out of this controversy in eleven other states.

In addition to destruction of property, more than a score of people were killed and a larger number, seriously injured. As in the other disputes attended by major conflict between strikers and strikebreakers, the action of the strikers appeared to have been influenced by the feeling that the companies would not agree to any concessions and that they were determined to prevent the establishment of any representative organization. On the other hand, the employer was unwilling to concede the right of a labor organization to represent his employees; he was determined to remain absolute master in his own establishment.

The great majority of participants in these early labor disturbances were Americans or those who had become acquainted with American customs and standards. In none of these disputes was the question of ideology raised; the workers fought for changes in the terms of employment or were resisting changes demanded by the employer. The disputes originated in the settled industrial areas or on the railroads where the work force was predominantly made up of stable employees.

COAL STRIKES

Following the chronology in terms of large-scale violence, the bituminous coal strike of 1897 and the anthracite walk-out of 1902 might be noted. In both of these disputes, the United Mine Workers of America sought to establish itself as the spokesman of the miners. In the bituminous coal industry, the union succeeded in gaining general acceptance from a large majority of northern operators. Few difficulties arose

during the course of the strike, but the effort of minority operators in the Pana and Virden, Illinois, area to man their mines with strikebreakers led to sharp clashes between strikers and strikebreakers in which a number were killed and wounded. Intervention by Governor John R. Tanner and the sending of troops to restore order ended the rioting. The removal of strikebreakers and the recognition of the United Mine Workers ended all differences.

The anthracite coal district of Pennsylvania had been unorganized since the defeat of the Workingmen's Benevolent Association in the 1870's. The only labor-connected violence took place in 1897, when a march of several thousand miners from Hazleton to Latimer was fired upon by armed deputies, killing nineteen of the marchers and injuring a larger number. United Mine Workers of America had organized the anthracite fields in 1900, but the union had only received partial recognition. In 1902, the operators believed they could turn back the clock to an earlier period. A strike for wage changes and union recognition started, and before President Theodore Roosevelt was able to gain an agreement for the acceptance of a Presidential Commission to settle the strike, fifteen had been killed and forty seriously injured.

The coal industry was employing, in the 1890's and the early part of the twentieth century, a large number of immigrants from southeastern Europe, but the violence that accompanied differences over the terms of employment could not be attributed to the racial or national origin of the workers involved, for some of the bloodiest encounters took place between native Americans and their employers.

THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN STATES

Violence frequently accompanied the disputes between labor and management

in the Rocky Mountain coal and metal-liferous mining areas. The strike of metal miners in the Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, in 1892, was followed by the blowing up of one of the mines and the killing of several strikers and strike-breakers. Federal troops restored order. Seven years later, a more serious outbreak of violence followed the calling of a strike in the same region. One of the mines in the area was wrecked by strikers who seized a train, assaulted those working, and destroyed property. At the request of Governor Steunenberg, federal troops were sent to the Coeur d'Alene, and they rounded up strikers and kept them in a bull pen under harsh conditions. The suffering of those imprisoned was said to have been the direct cause of the assassination of Governor Frank Steunenberg, although the union officers charged with the crime were acquitted.

The conflict in the Coeur d'Alene was dwarfed by events in Colorado. Strikes in the Colorado metal-mining district in the 1880's and 1890's had been, at times, accompanied by violence necessitating the intervention of state troops and deputy sheriffs, but nothing like the one which raged throughout 1903 and 1904 was ever experienced before or since. Supported by the governor, the operators were determined to drive the Western Federation of Miners out of the area. The latter defended itself and inflicted serious damage upon its adversaries, but it fought a losing battle. Merely to enumerate the deportations of men not convicted of wrongdoing, the removal of duly elected officers, the destruction of property, and the killing of strikers and strikebreakers would fill many pages. The strike in the Cripple Creek district ordered by Western Federation of Miners, District Union No. 1, on August 3, 1903, was the result of dissatisfaction with the settlement of a walkout earlier that year of

miners and smelters in the Cripple Creek area. The Mine Owners Association denounced the calling of the walkout, as an "arbitrary and unjustifiable action" which "mars the annals of organized labor, and we denounce it as an outrage against both the employer and the unemployed." The Association announced it would operate without the consent of the union as soon as it could replace the strikers. A number of assaults took place, and the Governor sent troops who arrived in Cripple Creek on September 4, 1903. During the same period, a strike of mill men for a reduction of hours of work was going on in Telluride, and a compliant Governor sent troops although no violence had taken place. The militia subsequently arrested twenty-two men, including a former attorney-general of Colorado. The twenty-two and sixty-one others were deported from Telluride. Subsequently, the Citizens' Alliance, an anti-union business and professional group, rounded up an additional sixty union miners and deported them from the county.

In December, the Governor proclaimed Teller County, in which the Cripple Creek area was located, in a state of insurrection, and suspended the writ of habeas corpus. Union men were rounded up and imprisoned or deported. On January 26, 1904, the cage containing sixteen men leaving a mine working in defiance of the union dropped, instantly killing the occupants. The Western Federation was charged with this outrage. Nevertheless, state troops were withdrawn from Teller County by April 1, 1904. Although the Governor pleaded for reconciliation, the mine operators introduced the "rustling card," a card permitting an applicant to seek work at the mine and a method for blacklisting members of the Western Federation of Miners. The mineowners in other areas adopted similar methods.

Determined to destroy the Western Federation of Miners, the operators refused any compromises. Retaliation by the union followed. The dynamiting of the Independence depot on June 6, 1904, was responsible for the death of thirteen nonunion miners who had just finished their shifts and were awaiting transportation. Others were seriously maimed. The dynamiting was attributed to the Western Federation of Miners, and Harry Orchard, later charged with the murder of Governor Frank Steunenberg of Idaho, confessed to the crime. Reprisals against union members began immediately, although no evidence existed, at the time, connecting the Western Federation of Miners with the dynamiting of the Independence depot. City and county officials suspected of union sympathy were forced to resign, and the co-operative stores operated by union members were looted and forced to close. The *Victor Record*, a local newspaper friendly to the miners' union was wrecked by a mob. Many miners and their sympathizers were deported to Kansas and New Mexico. The character of the antiunion activity may be noted in the fact that Colorado's Adjutant General Sherman Bell ordered the closing down of a mine which continued to follow its former policy of employing miners irrespective of their affiliation or nonaffiliation with the Western Federation of Miners.

Military rule was lifted in November 1904, but the campaign against union miners and their supporters continued by the Citizens' Alliance and the local authorities whom they now fully controlled. Sheriff Edward Bell of Teller county, a leader in the campaign against the Western Federation of Miners, announced:

The danger is all past. There are less than 100 of the radical miners left in the Cripple

Creek district. The rest have been deported, or have left the district because they were unable to gain employment. They can never get work there again. The mine owners have adopted a card system by which no miner can gain admittance to a mine unless he has a card showing that he does not belong to a union.²

The evidence indicates that the members of the Western Federation of Miners sometimes resorted to violence, but that the great majority who were members were law-abiding workers. The miners operated a number of stores in the Colorado mining area, and they carried on other civic activities. In the campaign to extirpate the union, many were abused, held in bull pens, and deported, and among them were lawyers, merchants, and craftsmen who were not members of the miners' union. The ferocity of the campaign and retaliation appears to have been caused by the determination of the operators to rid themselves of union control. It is true that the Western Federation could not impose discipline upon its members, but the opposition, while charging the union with lawlessness, was anxious to rid itself of the restrictions which collective bargaining inevitably imposes. The initial differences were over terms of employment. In a sense, the extreme measures taken reflected the direct action of the frontier, to which both sides were predisposed. The violent measures of the operators, supported by the governor, were more prolonged and extreme than in the disputes in the East. The greater involvement of the community may have been the result of the dependence of many businesses upon the single industry which dominated the economy of the region.

² The summary in this section is based largely on *Labor Disturbance in Colorado*, United States Senate Document No. 122, 58th Congress, 3d Session, 1905. The quotation from Sheriff Bell appears on pp. 318-319.

LOCALIZED CONFLICTS

Simultaneous with the Colorado metal-mining war, the teamsters in Chicago became involved in a dispute with Montgomery Ward and Company. Charges of corruption were brought against the union officers, but the violence was triggered by the attempt of the company to replace the striking teamsters. Under the direction of one of the chief suppliers of strikebreakers and guards of the period, James Farley, attempts were made to continue deliveries. These efforts were met by sharp resistance from the unionized teamsters. Eventually, the strike was defeated amidst charges that it had been initially a shakedown operation. In the bitter controversy, an estimated twenty persons were killed and several hundred, seriously injured.

The strikes that stand out for their violence are those in which employers refused to deal with their employees over the terms of employment and those in which professional strike guards and strikebreakers were employed. In such instances, employers inevitably sought to replace their idle employees, and attempts to abort these efforts led to conflict. From the Homestead strike until the 1930's, employers who were determined to prevent unionization of their personnel could avail themselves of professional strikebreakers and guards who might or might not be deputized. The appearance of these guards and striker-replacements frequently triggered the worst riots in labor disputes.

The strike of the Pressed Car Steel workers at McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, in 1909, started as a spontaneous walkout over the rates of pay among skilled workers. The strikers were joined by most of the other employees. William Trautman, general organizer of the Industrial Workers of the World, became the leader of the walkout, and

he was assisted by local labor groups. When the killing of Stephen Hovath, who was peacefully drinking beer, occurred, the walkout took a violent turn. A secret committee announced that for every striker killed a deputy sheriff or a member of the state constabulary would be assassinated. Thirteen people died in the clashes between the strikers and strikebreakers and police.

The employees of the Pressed Steel Car Company were mainly foreigners of southeastern European extraction, and they reacted with the same bitter violence as Anglo-Saxon metal miners did in Colorado. Southeastern European immigrants were also the principal employees at the South Bethlehem plant of the Bethlehem Steel Company. A dispute over a discharge was supported by the entire plant work force, who now asked the company to recognize the newly formed labor organization. President Charles M. Schwab announced "that under no circumstances will we deal with men on strike or a body representing organized labor fields."³ Similar views were expressed by the heads of companies involved in other strikes for recognition. Some violence followed.

When the unorganized coal miners in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, tried to establish a union in the same year, a Congressional committee, investigating the latter dispute, found that

the deputies and constables paraded the highways and in many cases, it is claimed, treated the strikers with undue severity. They were armed with pistols and clubs or blackjacks and many of them were mounted. Many strikers were attacked by the deputies or constables on the road and when parties of strikers were men the mounted officers often dispersed them by beating them or riding them down . . .

³ *Statement in Report on Strike at Bethlehem Steel Works*, Senate Document No. 521, 61st Congress, 2d Session, 1910, pp. 25-26.

Many strikers were severely beaten by the deputies and constables, even when they were not near the mine or mine villages.⁴

Ten deaths are recorded—six strikers and a sympathizer, two men working and a deputy sheriff—and many more were injured. The cause of this strike was the refusal of the coal companies in the county to accept the Central Competitive Field agreement which governed many of the northern bituminous fields.

MUNICIPAL TRANSPORTATION

Strikes in municipal transportation were especially likely to develop into violent encounters if efforts to resume operation with strikebreakers were attempted. Violence was usually precipitated by attempts to prevent resumption of service, and strikes of streetcar men were attended by street fighting and use of firearms in San Francisco in 1907; Cleveland in 1908; Philadelphia in 1910; and Buffalo, New York in 1913. In San Francisco, according to *The Outlook*, strikebreakers opened fire on pickets and "some twenty men were wounded, five it was said mortally."⁵

The professional who was recruited by private detective agencies in municipal transportation strikes was a tough breed who was ready to face danger, and not averse to creating trouble. During the Philadelphia streetcar strike in 1910, it was reported that

a band of strike breakers furnished by private detective agencies . . . for temporary use—took a car down a crowded thoroughfare at high speed shooting into the crowds on the sidewalk and wounding several persons.⁶

⁴ *Report on the Miners' Strike in Bituminous Coal Field in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania*, U.S. House of Representatives, Document No. 847, 62d Congress, 2d Session, 1910, p. 82.

⁵ *The Outlook*, May 1907, p. 88.

⁶ *The Public*, March 18, 1910, p. 253.

UNORGANIZED STRIKES

The employment of private guards was one of the more serious reasons for violence. For example, in 1915, in a spontaneous strike of oil workers at Bayonne, New Jersey, guards fired into the ranks of marching pickets, killing six and injuring a large number. The sheriff intervened, arrested the gunmen, and settled the strike, but fifteen months later in another strike against one of the same companies, several people were killed by gunfire of the strike guards.⁷

MICHIGAN COPPER MINES

The intransigent attitudes of one of the parties in such matters as union recognition or adopting changes of a fundamental character may arouse strong feelings, especially when attempts to replace strikers are made. As Andrew Carnegie once observed:

To expect that one dependent upon his daily wage for the necessaries of life will stand by peaceably and see a new man employed in his stead is to expect much.

Violence is increased by the presence, as has been common in labor disputes in the past, of private guards or deputized watchmen paid for by the employer. In the Michigan copper strike of 1913, guards were provided by the Waddell-Mahon corporation, engaged in providing this service, before the strike started. They were armed, and tried to overawe the strikers. A number were killed.

WEST VIRGINIA AND COLORADO COAL FIELDS

As has been noted, a leading cause of violence in labor disputes is the refusal of one of the parties to accept changes in the terms of employment. The changes which are most likely to cause serious tension are those which

⁷ *The Survey*, August 7, 1915, pp. 414-415; January 22, 1916, p. 477-479.

concern the recognition of the union. Operators in important sections of the bituminous coal fields of West Virginia and Colorado refused to participate in joint negotiations with the United Mine Workers of America. Logan, McDowell, and Mingo counties became important coal-producing areas which were unrestrained by union rules. As production in the nonunion counties of West Virginia expanded, the competitive problem for the organized districts became more pressing. Northern coal operators, compelled to maintain the higher standards in their union agreements, insisted that the nonunion districts be brought under control. Several attempts were made between 1897 and 1910, and a more aggressive campaign to extend the influence of the United Mine Workers of America was undertaken. The companies resisted, and expelled the miners from the company houses which had been rented to them. Baldwin-Felts guards were brought in to protect company property, and the union set up tent colonies to shelter the dispossessed miners from the Paint Creek and Cabin Creek areas. Clashes between guards and strikers led to a request for troops. The miners found the state militiamen equally obnoxious. Miners were imprisoned under military law. Troops were withdrawn and returned to the strike districts three times. The attack upon the miners' tent colony by an armored train, called the "Bull Moose" special, during the night aroused a sufficient storm to bring about an investigation by the United States Senate, but no changes in union-management relations followed, although an estimated thirty people were killed in the fighting.

The Colorado coal strike in 1913, with its virtual civil war, was ended only after the intervention of federal troops. The Ludlow tragedy, in which the tent colony was burned and two

women and eleven children smothered, fanned the bitter anger of the miners and their sympathizers to fever heat. A call for volunteers was sent out by the Colorado labor movement, and armed men took possession of the mining area and seized mines, fired buildings, and killed guards. In ten days of fighting, more than fifty people, including the sixteen who died at Ludlow, lost their lives. In this struggle, it seemed as if the fury of the Colorado mining war of the early part of the century had returned. The difference was that the 1903-1904 strike was made up mostly of American and Americanized workers, while the 1913 coal strikers had large numbers of foreign workmen among them. The differences between the strikers and their employers in both instances, while varying in detail, were essentially the same, the desire to set the terms of employment through collective bargaining.

CLOTHING WORKERS

Violence also appears in the strikes for recognition of clothing workers in 1910 and 1911 in Chicago, Cleveland, and New York. In all of these communities, the workers organized and demanded recognition of their unions. In New York City, considerable violence followed, and eventually partial recognition was accorded by the employers. During the strike, the use of hired gunmen on both sides took place, and the killing of a company guard led to the indictment of several union officers who were eventually acquitted.

The Cleveland garment strike of 1911 resulted in one death and a number of riots accompanied by shooting, slugging, and destruction of property.⁸ Far

⁸ Information from *Facts* of the Cleveland Employers Association, in an article by C. E. Ruthenberg, "The Cleveland Garment Workers' Strike," *International Socialist Review* (September 1911), p. 136.

more violent was the men's clothing strike in Chicago in 1910, in part because more workers were involved. The strike started, on September 22, 1910, as a protest against the reduction in piece rates. The strike spread quickly and engulfed the entire Chicago industry. A committee was established, but the employers refused to meet with it. The United Garment Workers of America, the union in the trade, took command, but it was not able to gain for a time a satisfactory agreement. Only after 133 days was limited recognition given to the newly organized union. Private detectives to escort their strikebreakers had been hired, and they were involved in several shootings in which pickets were killed and wounded. In the 133 days of the strike, seven were killed, an unknown number seriously injured, and 874 arrests made.

SOUTHERN LUMBER

No area of the United States was immune to strike violence, virtually all of it arising in situations where an employer refused either to deal with a union or to agree, as in the Illinois Central and Harriman railroad strikes, to accept a fundamental change in bargaining. In 1912, during a strike led by the Brotherhood of Timber Workers, an affiliate of the Industrial Workers of the World, an attempt was made to prevent the continuance of operations during the walkout. In a clash that followed, three union men and a deputy sheriff were killed. The strikers and deputies were all native Americans.

RAILROAD STRIKE

The Harriman system and Illinois Central Railroad strike affected about 40,000 shopmen on the above two lines. The strike on the Harriman lines, located mainly in the western part of the country, was unattended by large-scale violence, but events developed differ-

ently along the Illinois Central Railroad. In the last day of October 1911, a train carrying strikebreakers was attacked by armed men at Macomb, Mississippi; ten were killed, a number were wounded, and cars were burned. The state militia was brought to the scene, and peace was restored when the strikebreakers were escorted out of the area. Lesser disturbances occurred in Water Valley, Mississippi and New Orleans, Louisiana. The magnitude of the violence can be noted by the fact that twenty persons, all but two of them strikers, lost their lives in connection with the strike.

POST-WORLD WAR I

The period immediately following World War I witnessed a series of strikes in a number of industries. Expansion of union membership during the war was, in many instances, reluctantly tolerated. Several million new recruits to the union movement were also awaiting the end of the war to make additional demands upon their employers. The consequence was that many strikes took place, some as a result of the refusal of the employer to make concessions or even to continue recognition of the union, in many instances forced upon him by the wartime pressure of the government. One of the larger strikes, in the steel industry, was for union recognition, although other demands were also presented. Led by the United States Steel Corporation, the industry refused to make any concessions on the issue of union recognition. A strike was called on September 22, 1919, and the overwhelming majority of production employees responded.

Clashes between the police—reinforced in Pennsylvania by the state constabulary—and strikers were common. In Gary, Indiana, federal troops were requested after a clash between strikers and strikebreakers in the second week

of the strike. The worst excesses were, however, in Pennsylvania. Organizers were driven out of town during the organizing campaign and the strike. Meetings were suppressed, strikers were beaten, and strike activities impeded. Twenty people, eighteen of them strikers, perished in the strike, and many more suffered serious injuries.

COAL AGAIN

Two of the more bloody disputes took place in different sections—West Virginia and Illinois—of the bituminous coal industry in the early 1920's. As was noted above, the coal miners' union never succeeded in drawing the major West Virginia fields into the Central Competitive Field. Operating from a more favorable competitive position as a result of their ability to keep the union off their territory, major producers in West Virginia were determined to prevent unionization of their properties. Union organizers were harassed, and sometimes more forcibly handled. Not all of West Virginia operated under a nonunion regime, and, in September 1919, the organized miners threatened to invade the nonunion counties. The armed contingent turned back in response to the pleas of the Governor and union officers.

In May 1920, trouble started between some of the newly organized and company guards in Mingo and McDowell counties. While Baldwin-Felts agents were evicting a union miner, an argument started between the guards and the sheriff and the mayor of the town, and ten were killed by gunshot wounds. In another battle between guards and strikers in Mingo county, on August 21, 1920, six were reported killed. The Governor requested federal troops, and their appearance ended the rioting. A large number of deputy sheriffs were appointed, which made it possible to withdraw the federal troops, but their

departure brought a renewal of violence. In December 1920, the prosecuting attorney of Mingo county attributed sixteen killings directly to the strike at the Mingo county mines.

The strikers had been dispossessed from the company houses, and many were living in tent colonies. The federal soldiers, who had returned after the recrudescence of violence, were again withdrawn in January 1921. For a time the area was peaceful, but, in May 1921, warfare between the striking miners and company guards was reopened on a broad front. The organized miners and their striking co-unionists sought to enter the nonunion counties, and the armed company guards were as determined to prevent their entry. The objective of the union men was Logan County where a domineering sheriff repressed every vestige of union influence. Skirmishes between the two sides began at several points, and heavy fighting between miners and guards and deputies took place. The Governor appealed for aid, and President Warren Harding, after appealing vainly for peace, sent troops to disarm the miners. Six hundred miners surrendered to the federal troops; they were disarmed and sent home. Several hundred were indicted for conspiracy and for treason, but the prosecution was unable to gain convictions, and the indictments were dismissed. An estimated twenty-one people lost their lives in the battles.

A Senate Committee found that both sides were guilty of acts of violence. It found acts of the United Mine Workers absolutely indefensible. Men have been killed, property has been destroyed, telephone wires cut, trains commandeered and misused, a march of some thousands of men organized and policies carried out which bordered close on insurrection.⁹

⁹ *West Virginia Coal Fields*, Hearings Pursuant to Resolution 80, 1920, p. 7.

The same committee condemned the payment of deputy sheriffs by company funds:

The system of paying sheriffs out of funds contributed by the operators, as the testimony shows has been done in Logan County, where a large number of deputy sheriffs were paid not out of the public treasury but by funds of operators.

The committee also criticized the use of deputy sheriffs, paid by private funds, to prevent men, suspected of union affiliation, from coming into the area. The committee concluded: "There is complete industrial autocracy in this county."¹⁰

The Coal Commission noted that almost all of the nonunion counties

were almost exclusively peopled by mountaineers—native whites of ancient American ancestry. Their annals are crimson with feuds and the gun was the "supreme court" . . . Much of the violence had nothing to do with the nature and racial characteristics of the people, yet it furnished excellent argument for one side or the other.

The assault upon the men brought into Herrin, Williamson County, Illinois, to replace the miners participating in a general strike in the Central Competitive field was one of the bloodiest in labor records. The Southern Illinois Coal Company had negotiated with the union prior to the strike of April 1922, and its employees joined the general walkout. After two weeks, the company with the permission of the union began stripping the surface. Later the company broke relations with the union and began mining coal. Those brought in were members of an independent union which John L. Lewis described as an "outlaw organization," meaning a dual unaffiliated union. When the local miners attempted to confer with their replacements, they

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

were greeted by gunfire, and two of the unionists were killed. The killings were perpetrated by guards brought in by William J. Lester, who controlled the company, to protect operations. Lester had been warned of the danger of his conduct by the Sheriff of Williamson County in which Herrin was located. He disregarded the advice. In the latter part of June, a contingent of armed miners stormed the stockade, after spraying it with rifle fire. The men behind the wall surrendered, and they were beaten and shot. Eighteen guards and strikebreakers, including Lester, died, making the total of twenty-one who perished in this attempt to break the union.

After 1923, the number of strikes and strike participants declined sharply, but occasional violence, even of considerable size, took place during labor disputes. A legislative committee investigating the shopmen's strike on the Missouri and North Arkansas Railroad, in which a striker was lynched on January 16, 1923, found mobs had invaded homes "without due process of law and without legal authority," in Harrison, Arkansas. No one was punished. In the 1929 textile strikes, seven persons were killed and twenty-nine seriously injured as a result of clashes between pickets and strikers and strikebreakers and police.

THE NEW DEAL

The spread of labor organization and labor disputes in the early years of the New Deal led to increased violence. The most notable was the rioting in San Francisco which followed the attempt to reopen the docks during the Pacific Coast longshoremen's strike. After two were killed and many injured, on April 5, 1934, the Governor sent state troops into the city for the first time in thirty-five years. Violent clashes between pickets and strikebreakers and police

resulted in serious injury to a large number and the killing of a policeman and a picket in Seattle, Washington. Four other pickets were wounded in an attack upon a group of strikebreakers. In Portland, Oregon, the governor threatened to call out troops if violence was not ended.

During the same year, a Minneapolis teamster strike necessitated the calling out of state troops. Serious disorder led to the setting up of a special police force, but they were attacked by pickets, and one of the special police was killed. Violence continued throughout most of the strike. Two strikers were killed during the remainder of the walkout, and many strikers and others were severely injured. The national cotton-textile strike was perhaps the most violent labor dispute of 1934. Begun on August 31, 1934, the strike affected most of the areas in which cotton textiles were produced. A gun battle between strikers and strikebreakers in Georgia and South Carolina textile areas led to the killing of eight people. The militia was ordered to the strike zones in both states, and also in Alabama. Northern textile areas were also affected, and violence caused the governors of Rhode Island and Connecticut to send troops to the textile centers. Claims were made that more than 10,000 soldiers had been on strike duty during the troubles, and that thirteen had been killed in various clashes.

In the Kohler Company dispute in Kohler Village, Wisconsin, in 1934, the governor felt impelled to send the militia to restore order after a riot had caused the death of two pickets and injury to a larger number. Troops were also sent to Toledo, Ohio during the strike of auto workers, in the same year, against several stamping and tool companies. A clash between strikers and the militia led to the killing of two strikers and the wounding of several

others, and before the strike ended it was estimated that more than two hundred strikers and nonstrikers had been injured.

THE LITTLE STEEL STRIKE

The Little steel strike in which fifteen strikers and their sympathizers were killed and more than one hundred seriously injured was the last labor dispute in which important companies refused to recognize a union by signing of a formal contract. On the first day of the strike, May 25, 1937, a picket was shot down by a company guard of the Republic plant in Canton, Ohio. A larger and more distressing clash took place on Memorial Day before the South Chicago plant of the Republic Steel Company. Assuming that the parading strikers intended to force open the plant, the police attacked the marchers. Ten men died from blows of police clubs and firearms. Many others were seriously injured. In Johnstown, Pennsylvania, fear of violence led Governor George Earle to send troops to protect strikers. After the killing of a striker before the plant of the Youngstown Sheet and Tuber Company, Governor Martin Dewey sent troops to Trumbull and Warren counties. An estimated fifteen workers were killed in this strike.

VIOLENCE AFTER THE LITTLE STEEL STRIKE

The protection given labor through the enactment of the Wagner and Taft-Hartley Acts has blunted many of the weapons formerly used by employers in labor disputes. The extensive use of private guards, hired sluggers, and company operatives to ferret out union members, vividly exposed by the Senate Committee headed by Robert M. La-Follette, Jr., has led to a sharp reduction in violence. Although the older type of dispute occasionally reappears

as in the Florida East Coast Railway strike, the great majority of labor disputes are not surrounded by the extreme violence of an earlier period. Nevertheless, it must be noted that violence has by no means vanished from the American labor scene.

Since the end of World War II violence in labor disputes has appreciably diminished. Although serious clashes leading to death and serious injury have occasionally reappeared, considering the number of workers covered by joint agreements and the level of strikes, violence can be said to have been sharply reduced. Even more hopefully, in several years in the 1950's, no homicides resulting from strike violence have been reported. A large amount

of the serious violence which has taken place in the last two decades has followed, as in the lockout of the Toledo, Peoria and Western Railroad strike, the refusal of an employer to accept current labor practices, or has arisen in the border states and in the South where resistance to recognition of union labor is great. One of the great contributions of the National Labor Relations Board has been the virtual elimination of the old-fashioned labor war, resulting in a sharp diminution of violence in labor disputes. Not only are employers prohibited from utilizing many former devices to abort organization by their employees, but they must deal with the representatives of their workers in a proper bargaining unit.