

South and everywhere tended to benefit white male workers. New Deal legislation increased the benefits that African Americans derived from the federal government, especially in northern cities, where black voters gradually shifted to the Democratic Party beginning in the late 1930s. Yet New Deal employment benefits did not apply to agricultural workers or domestic workers, which meant that most black and female workers were not covered by unemployment insurance or Social Security. At the same time, programs such as the Agricultural Adjustment Act and the Tennessee Valley Authority, among others, directly or indirectly displaced significant numbers of black farmers, tenants, and sharecroppers from the land. Conservative opposition and the Democrats' desire to scale back federal action after the flurry of legislation in 1935 and 1936 also moderated the immediate influence of the New Deal. The NLRA had to survive legal challenges, which prevented aggressive action by the NLRB during the first years of its existence. Moreover, as some of the New Deal measures began to improve economic conditions, President Roosevelt and his advisors moved to scale back federal spending in the belief that the recovery could proceed on its own, and the economy slowed down again. The resulting "Roosevelt Recession," combined with popular reaction against Roosevelt's efforts to pack the Supreme Court with New Deal-friendly justices, basically brought the New Deal to a standstill in 1938 and 1939.

The New Industrial Union Movement

For all its limitations, the Second New Deal helped energize the U.S. labor movement. With federal recognition of their right to organize, American workers in previously non-union industries created another surge in organizing activity. This new movement to organize the unorganized differed from the 1934 strikes because it was a coordinated and concerted drive for industrial unionism. Led by John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers of America, Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, and David Dubinsky of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the Committee for Industrial Organization (soon to be the Congress of Industrial Organizations, or the CIO) operated autonomously from the outset, although it was officially within the structure of the AFL, and it set out to organize industrial rather than craft unions.

Lewis, Hillman, and Dubinsky took advantage of workers' newfound rights by building unions in the mass production industries. They first formed the Steelworkers Organizing Committee (SWOC), led by Phillip Murray, to unionize steelworkers excluded from the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers, which had long represented only skilled steelworkers. In 1936 and 1937, the CIO broke through in the notoriously anti-union auto industry by deploying sit-in strikes at General Motors plants in Flint, Michigan (Figure 8). Occupying the GM factories, workers won community support and, after bitter battles in the streets (with many women on the front lines), they forced the company to recognize the CIO union. The stunning success at GM persuaded U.S. Steel, the nation's largest steel producer, to recognize Murray's steelworkers' union without a strike. The CIO faced continued, often violent resistance from Ford and from the group of steel companies collectively known as "Little Steel." Nonetheless, within months hundreds of thousands of workers joined the "house of labor," and the momentum spread among workers in packing houses, newspapers, the electrical industry, the public sector, canneries, and even white-collar workplaces.

As the CIO succeeded in organizing industrial workers, the differences between the AFL and the new unions became increasingly apparent. The CIO built unions in manufacturing centers that had been ignored by the AFL. AFL and