

Labor Unions- Part 3: The General Strike of 1934 and the Battle for Union Leadership ^[1]

Labor Unions

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See also: [Child Labor](#) ^[2]; [Flying Squadrons](#) ^[3]; [Gastonia Strike](#) ^[4]; [Harriet-Henderson Cotton Mills Strike](#) ^[5]; [Right-to-Work Law](#) ^[6]; [Textile Strike of 1934](#) ^[7]

[Labor Unions- Part 1: Introduction](#) ^[8]

[Labor Unions- Part 2: Early Labor Movements and Conflicts in the Textile Industry](#) ^[9]

[Labor Unions- Part 3: The General Strike of 1934 and the Battle for Union Leadership](#)

[Labor Unions- Part 4: Civil Rights Unionism, "Operation Dixie," and the Birth of the ACTWU](#) ^[10]


[Labor Unions- Part 5: North Carolina Organized Labor: The Modern Era](#) ^[11]

Part 3: The General Strike of 1934 and the Battle for Union Leadership

A surge in union membership coincided with the widespread recognition in the summer of 1934 that national recovery had not taken hold and that violations of [National Recovery Administration](#) ^[12] (NRA) standards had become commonplace. The stage for a great confrontation had been set in May, when the NRA's textile board announced a reduction in hours of operation that resulted in the closing of many mills for one week each month. In mid-August at a national UTW convention, southern representatives called for a general strike. On 1 September organized car caravans known as "flying squadrons" moved through the Carolinas, shutting down mills with remarkable speed. Within a week, about 400,000 textile workers nationwide had left the mills, and the industry had virtually closed down in every state, including North Carolina.

The [General Strike of 1934](#) ^[7], the largest in American history, ended abruptly in failure. The UTW had rested its hopes for winning concessions from manufacturers on the intervention of the federal government. But the Roosevelt administration went only so far as endorsing the findings of a mediation panel that called for further study and general recognition of legitimate grievances by workers. The union, fearing the loss of federal support if it did not comply with the recommendations of the mediation panel, ended the strike after only 22 days.

Never again would textile workers in any region or state demonstrate such broad solidarity as they did in September 1934. Nor did the UTW regain the strength it had enjoyed during that period; it gradually lost membership and influence to the [Textile Workers Union of America](#) ^[13] (TWUA), an affiliate of the [Congress of Industrial Organizations](#) ^[14] (CIO) founded in Philadelphia in May 1939. During its formative years, the TWUA met resistance from both manufacturers and rival unions. In North Carolina several mills voted to accept the union, including 10 Fieldcrest mills in [Rockingham County](#) ^[15] (in 1939 and 1941) and the [Harriet and Henderson](#) ^[16] mills in [Henderson County](#) ^[17] (1943). By the end of [World War II](#), ^[18] membership in the TWUA stood at 450,000.

Keep reading >>[Labor Unions- Part 4: Civil Rights Unionism, "Operation Dixie," and the Birth of the ACTWU](#) ^[10]  ^[10]

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