The chapter presents an account of some of the key institutional factors shaping the growth of the trade union movement in the United States. It is a window on the contemporary social dynamics that informed the rise of worker movements and labor organizations.

George May, UAW 1973

In the early part of the postwar period—from 1945 until the early
1970s—a sharp rise in union membership and union density occurred among both industrial workers and government workers.

The chapter begins with an account of the postwar period's main
characteristics and how they influenced the growth of union
organization. It focuses on the development of union organizing
strategies and strategies for improving workers' wages and work
conditions. It also examines the role of key labor organizations
like the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial
Workers in shaping the course of the movement.

Robert Rogers

Don't Worry! Be Happy: The Poster War

The poster war of the 1970s was a defining moment for labor
organization in the United States. It was characterized by a fierce
competition between unions and employers for public support.

The chapter explores the role of the poster in this context, with
special attention to the role of union-made posters. It examines
how unions used posters to promote their causes and to challenge
the strength of employer opposition. It also looks at how the
poster war reflected broader trends in labor organizing and how
it helped shape the future course of the movement.
The HDC offers longer-term cooperative strategies with employers, increasing social value. Employee-friendly policies are effective in attracting and retaining employees, and cooperative strategies can benefit both employees and employers. HDCs offer a range of services, including training, education, and research, to support the development of knowledge and skills. The HDC also supports the growth of new businesses and the expansion of existing ones, creating new job opportunities and boosting the economy. Through these strategies, HDCs can help to create a more stable and prosperous society for all members. To succeed, HDCs must work closely with employers, workers, and other stakeholders to develop effective cooperative strategies and ensure their sustainability. By doing so, HDCs can contribute to a more equitable and just society, where everyone has access to the opportunities they need to thrive.
The implementation of the U.S. union movement to "Don't Worry, be Happy."
The limited accord

The Accord, a model of coordination between unions and companies, was seen as a way to resolve the deep-seated divisions in the labor movement. It was established after the 1970s labor unrest and the failure of previous attempts to negotiate a national labor agreement.

The Accord was designed to prevent future labor disputes by creating a framework for employers and unions to jointly negotiate wages, working conditions, and other employment terms. It was intended to replace the adversarial labor relations system that had characterized American industry for decades.

The Accord was based on the principles of mutual respect, cooperation, and shared responsibility. It was intended to improve the overall economic and social conditions of workers and their families, while also fostering innovation and growth in the economy.

Despite its initial success, the Accord faced many challenges and ultimately failed to achieve its goals. The main reason for the Accord's failure was the lack of enforcement and the inability to resolve deep-seated economic and social problems.

The Accord's failure led to renewed efforts by labor unions to negotiate with companies and the government to address workers' needs. These efforts ultimately led to the development of stronger labor protections and a more equitable economic system.
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Patterns of Decline

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immediately, the view is offered in opposition to the claim that union-employer dealings were stable for a long period; it does not capture or explain the perception that in fact they were.

The problems with this alternative view, as well as the problem from which it arises (the apparent lack of fit between the account of stable dealings through the early 1970s and the fact of continuous density decline), can be addressed through a brief analysis of union-density decline. Killing many birds with a single statistical stone, this analysis rests on a sector-specific explanation of the composition of that decline, and on the division of the postwar period into distinct subperiods.28

To see the force of this analysis, consider what the accord account offered above would imply for union-density decline. This requires pressing two assumptions in that account into sharper relief.

The first, implicit in my earlier account of bargaining dynamics and American exceptionalism, is that unions customarily organize workers (rather than workers organizing unions), and that in doing so unions behave in strategic ways. They choose an optimal level of organization and choose optimal sites for organization, taking into account the payoffs accruing from the addition of new members and the likely response of employers to organizing efforts.

The second assumption, noted at the outset, is that postwar labor regulation, centered in the LMRA, set the costs of organizing extremely high and provided no serious deterrent to employer attacks on unions. As a practical consequence of this, where unions are not able to compel employer recognition and bargaining through economic force, they have little or no redress against resistant employers.

Together these assumptions lead to a natural hypothesis, namely, that in the postwar period, unions were quite reluctant to organize in sectors where they did not already command significant power. Always admitting exceptions, as a general matter it would only be in such sectors that they could expect some mitigation of employer resistance—since only there would they have already made progress in taking wages out of competition. And only there, where there was resistance, could they expect to be able to overcome it through economic force.

In the framework of the accord analysis offered above, we can join these assumptions with what we know about the structure and scope of unionism to "predict" a certain pattern in union decline in the postwar period. Briefly, we know that coming into the postwar period, unions were organized in a limited and distinct number of sectors, with union power within those sectors concentrated in blue-collar (as against white- or pink-collar) jobs within them. If, as argued above, these union strongholds remained relatively stable through the early 1970s, then we would expect that most of the decline in overall union density would be accounted for simply by a decline in the share of total employment taken by these strongholds, not by a decline within them.29

Returning to the argument above, I claimed that these stable sectoral dealings were disrupted in the early 1970s and I attached particular importance to international price pressures. This would lead us to expect a decline in the importance of the "structural" variables of sector employment and occupation, and to expect that some defensible proxy for international price pressures would become a significant predictor of intrasector union decline, once occupation is taken into account, via controls. Finally, I argued that the postwar system began disintegrating rapidly in the 1980s. During this period, we would thus expect yet further decline in the power of the structural variables (and perhaps even a drop in the significance of the internationalization variable). The picture would become highly scrambled, as befits a period of wreckage and transition. The "system" would no longer display systemic properties.

Statistical analysis shows exactly these results, and thus offers confirmation of the account offered above.

Disaggregating the private economy into five sectors, a basic "shift-share" analysis of sectoral employment—predicting union density on the basis of shifts in the share of total employment claimed by different sectors (with different degrees of unionization)—shows great power in predicting density until the early 1970s, but much less power since then, and even less since the early 1980s.30 Using Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data, sectoral employment shifts account for 54–60 percent of the decline over the 1966–72 period; for the years 1972–78 sectoral shifts account for only 29–35 percent.31 Using different data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), but the same industry breakdown, only 22–27 percent of the decline between 1974 and 1980 and only 13–17 percent of the decline between 1980 and 1984 can be accounted for by such sectoral employment shifts.

Supplementing the sectoral variables with occupational data (the shift across white-, blue-, and pink-collar employment) strengthens the analysis, without disturbing the pattern of decline across periods in the power of structural variables. Using CPS data, industry and occupation shifts together account for 31–36 percent of the decline between 1974 and
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