radical preachings, built unions and cooperatives, and agitated for free land and agrarian reform. The line of demarcation between unionism and socialist politics or panaceas was quite thin.

An unstable capitalism produced a radical labor movement, more radical than that of any other in the world at that time.

In structure too, the tenuous unionism followed closely the limits laid down for it by early capitalism. In 1800, it still took two weeks—sixteen hours a day of hard riding by stage coach—to reach Indiana from New York. It took six weeks to reach St. Louis. Under such circumstances neither capital nor labor could be highly integrated. Local unions tended to group into city-central bodies, and did not try to form national craft organizations. For the better part of a century these city bodies — composed of unions of different crafts in a single city—were to be the power center of the movement.

When the National Trades' Union was organized in 1834 it consisted of seven city bodies — not a single national craft union. The city bodies did the organizing of new workers, coordinated strike action, engaged in politics. Their leaders, like those of the local unions themselves, were usually men who worked at the bench in the daytime and conducted their union activity in spare moments, nights and weekends, without pay, and with little glory. Such a unionism could only be idealistic, and unsullied by the ills of bigness that were to plague not only labor but the rest of our society later on.

The emasculation of these city-central bodies toward the end of the nineteenth century, and their reduction to minor legislative roles today, lowered the curtain on a proud period in labor's history. Union protagonists can be permitted a moment of nostalgia for this "little" labor movement which no longer exists, nor can ever exist again, but which, while it lasted, was free of the specific problems that bedevil the labor movement today when by force of circumstances it has been separated a few notches farther from the rank and file.



## III

The second major turning point in American history was the Civil War.

In the American saga this was, both for industry and labor, the bridge between 'littleness" and "bigness." Ostensibly the most dramatic issue in the war between the states was the freedom of the Negro slave. But at bottom, what was at stake was America's future as an industrial nation, capable not only of competing with, but outstripping Europe. In the thirty-five years following this bloody intramural conflict, production was increased by almost five, railroads by almost seven, times. From 1859 to 1899, the number of industrial plants tripled, the number of wage earners quadrupled, the value of commodities increased by seven times, and the amount of invested capital skyrocketed to nine times its former level. In the same period in England the value of products inched up by only 50 per cent, in France 45 per cent, and in Germany, then making the most rapid progress of all Europe, by a mere 65 per cent. Favored by its geographic position, safely wedged in between two oceans and militarily impregnable, blessed with unbelievable material wealth discovered in the West and the human wealth of millions of new immigrants, the United States grew far more rapidly than the atomized, hemmed-in, warring nations of Europe.