But none of this American advance could have been achieved if King Cotton in the South had not first been subdued. King Cotton was the halter around America's neck, preventing a mercantile nation from becoming an industrial one. The kind of America it sought was radically different from the kind of America sought by an industry-conscious North; and had it maintained its political grip on Congress and the administration as in previous decades, it would have been fatal both for industry—and labor.

King Cotton, after the invention of the cotton gin, needed new land to the North and West to replace the rapidly exhausted and poorly utilized land in the South. By wile and guile, therefore, it opposed the opening of the public domain to the free farmer and pioneer for fear they might pre-empt lands the South too wanted. It opposed state expenditure for roads, canals and other improvements which might benefit the capitalists to the North, but would only impose additional taxes on Southern Bourbons. It saw little sense in high tariffs to protect infant industries because its own *modus operandi* was based on selling cotton to England in exchange for cheaper goods from a more mature British industry. What the North wanted in high tariffs, new roads, subsidies to railroads, the South could not grant except at its own expense. The conflict therefore was "irrepressible" and the victory of the North indispensable if America were to be converted to giant industry, corporate management, and coast-to-coast abundance.

The Civil War, catastrophic as it was to both North and South, was from a historical point of view a vitalizing event. It did not bring the Negro slave full freedom nor did it obliterate all vestiges of Bourbonism in the South; but it did open more free land to the West for anxious pioneers, it did push the "iron horse" and highways inexorably westward, and it did give nascent American industry the tariff protection, the mass markets, and the subsidies it needed to bloom and flourish. As one of its side effects it also plowed the field for the simple, "business" unionism, that was a special American brand—unknown elsewhere.

Few people, either in industry or labor, understood the long-term implications of the Civil War at the time. Employers, for at least two decades, continued their frontal attacks on the labor movement, smashed scores of strikes, and forced many unions out of business, particularly during the depression of 1873-1878. Jay Gould, the railroad tycoon, typified the more harsh and perhaps prevailing management attitude when he said: "I can hire one-half of the working class to kill the other half." Class lines were drawn taut; hundreds died in the struggles between the Molly Maguires—a secret organization of coal miners—and the coal operators, in the railroad strikes of 1877, the Haymarket Riot in Chicago in 1886, and other disorders.

For their part, union leaders had little faith in the new capitalism or little hope of advancing the cause of the workingman within its framework. Most of them de-emphasized the simple bread-and-butter approach in favor of panaceas, "uplift," and socialism. The socialist content of unionism remained more important for many key union leaders than the wage-and-hour demands.

William H. Sylvis, one of the great unionists of this era and the architect of the first federation organized after the Civil War, the National Labor Union, believed that formation of producers' cooperatives would eventually undermine the capitalist way of life. "We must adopt a system," he said, "which will divide the profits of labor among those who produce