

ITU and TTS in Current Appraisals

Reprints of recent magazine articles that reflect significant opinion among business, industrial, and labor leaders on conditions that are importantly related to the Linotype sales field

“ITU: Tradition and Skill Make Strength”

The fifth in a series of appraisals of major American unions, appearing in *BUSINESS WEEK*, January 24, 1953

(REPRINTED BY SPECIAL PERMISSION)

Introductory Note by MLC. The Linotype organization includes numerous “card holders” in the International Typographical Union, both in the field and at Brooklyn. Many thousands of Linotypes are operated and maintained by ITU members. Mergenthaler Linotype Company endeavors always to preserve a complete and harmonious understanding of the business and industrial relationships which are thus a phase of the Company’s functions, both as an employer and as a service organization to the publishers and printers who also employ ITU members. For the prime purpose of this Sales Manual as a textbook for sales personnel, this appraisal of ITU by a business magazine provides an illuminating and neutral commentary on America’s oldest national union. The article follows:

IN CONGRESS they’re starting to talk about Taft-Hartley again. And in Indianapolis, in a graystone mansion that’s reminiscent of a fortress, the chiefs of the AFL International Typographical Union are watching and waiting.

To Woodruff Randolph, ITU president, and his union, the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947 is a nemesis. For Taft-Hartley has outlawed or sharply restricted a long list of ITU operating traditions, and ITU is, if anything, a tradition-directed labor union.

Self-Reliant—ITU and John L. Lewis’ United Mine Workers are the two major American unions that have chosen to exist beyond the pale of the T-H act. ITU officers have neither filed non-Communist oaths nor does the union report on its finances to the government. This means, of course, that the union has no access to the National Labor Relations Board for bargaining elections and certifications.

But that’s fine with Randolph. He feels that the only respectable way to get recognition is by being strong enough to organize and bargain for it. The union made little use of the board during the Wagner act era anyway.

ITU has never had a Communist problem. Under its constitution, ITU officers must take a non-Communist oath, and since ITU’s 94th convention last year, all members must take one.

There’s never been much trouble with corruption, either. The union prepares detailed financial statements for its members periodically, and auditing occurs frequently.

As Randolph sees it, “We are in full compliance with Taft-Hartley—we simply haven’t seen fit to use its so-called advantages.”

I. The Record

ITU is probably the classic example of a strong craft union deriving its strength from the skill of its members, the importance of their craft, and its age and traditional practices. The union passed its 100th birthday last year, making it the oldest national union in

America. To the compositor, his union is a religion—local shop units are called “chapels.”

In contrast to major unions in the mass production industries, whose strength stems from sheer numbers rather than skill, ITU has grown up relatively free of assistance from friendly governments and special legislation. And unlike most other old-time craft organizations, it has preserved a high degree of internal democracy. ITU calls itself the most democratic union in the nation, and most outside observers—including its newspaper and commercial printing employers—readily agree.

In terms of benefits to its members, it has been in the top ranks for years. Its 100,000 journeymen compositors, machine maintenance men, and newspaper mailers averaged \$5,000 apiece last year working 37½ hours a week or less. ITU has been paying death benefits to members' families since 1891. Its Union Printers Home, a hospital and sanitarium at Colorado Springs, opened a year later. The union has been paying pensions since 1908; payments currently are \$20 a week.

ITU's Approach—All this, the union feels, it has gained through militant collective bargaining backed up by the threat of strikes. It views this approach as the only proper one for a craft union. And it regards with indignation any attempts to interfere with its way of life. Since the Taft-Hartley act was passed, the union figures it has spent \$20-million in strike benefits, legal fees, and other outlays to battle against it.

The compositors are almost universally regarded as “a bunch of snobs.” This attitude is clearly connected with the benefits and high standards of competence of members and the union's belief that its traditions must be inviolate. The typical journeyman printer must complete a six-year apprentice program that includes a considerable amount of book-learning about labor, the union, and its heritage. Membership has increased gradually, allowing plenty of time for ITU principles to filter down to apprentices and new journeymen.

II. Taft-Hartley Impact

President Randolph maintains that the “gang of lawyers” that run the two major employers' associations—the American Newspaper Publishers Assn. and the Printing Industry of America, which represents commercial shops—are out to get his union.

His distrust of lawyers—a typical view in old-time union circles—stems from an almost inherent union fear and hatred of injunctions. He makes it quite clear, however, that he doesn't think even a majority of the individual newspapers and job shops that employ his members are after ITU. Most employers, in fact, have the highest regard for the union and have been getting along with it for years. Many feel they have been caught

in the middle of the Taft-Hartley controversy, and wherever possible they have sought to sidestep it, complying with the letter of the law and retaining what they can of their traditional working arrangements with the union.

Closed-Shop Battle—Basic to the union's whole relationship with the industry has been the closed shop. Immediately after this form of union security was abolished by Taft-Hartley in 1947, ITU announced that it would abandon written contracts and issue conditions of employment instead. Later it agreed to contracts provided that they contained 60-day cancellation clauses. Chicago publishers refused to go along with this, claiming that the union was asking them to violate the law by accepting closed-shop clauses. The two-year strike that followed in Chicago (BW—Sep.24'49,p110) was, according to the union, fought solely over wages. But it is generally conceded that Taft-Hartley prohibition of the closed shop and other traditional practices was back of it.

Randolph points out that the act doesn't even outlaw the closed shop as such, that it merely prohibits discrimination against hiring of nonunion men. He defies anyone to cite him a case where a nonunion compositor actually was discriminated against. Competence is still a requirement for employing a man anywhere, and Randolph feels that ITU-trained men are without peers in the industry. Employers seem to agree, because a look at the help-wanted ads in most areas will show a preference for union printers. This may smack of illegality, but unless a nonunion man is actually turned down for not being able to get into ITU, no laws are violated. The union believes that one of the evils of the T-H obstacles to the closed shop is that it allows the employer to help decide who will be an ITU member, since under the lawful union shop, the union must take anyone employers hire. Under this system, Randolph angrily observes, strikebreakers could be forced on the union as members, thus weakening the union's solidarity and traditions.

Licked—Many employers are still willing to allow ITU members to serve as foremen, but the union concedes that it has been beaten by Taft-Hartley prohibitions on the question of striking to organize foremen. The only other issue on which ITU admits a clear defeat is that of its demand for 60-day cancellation clauses in contracts. The court decision that permanently enjoins the union from this practice is called “thought control” by president Randolph.

Security—The contract that ended the long Chicago strike provided for “the maximum union security allowable under the Taft-Hartley act.” This has pretty much been the pattern in other ITU contracts since then, and

in effect it has resulted in something just slightly short of the traditional closed shop.

ITU security is further bolstered by the union attitude that each printer has a property right in his own job. Under union rules, a regular job holder may take time off and pick an ITU member as a substitute to serve in his place. Under the priority rule, when a regular job is vacant, the substitute with the most service is entitled to the job. This gives ITU members preferential status. But it hasn't been held illegal under T-H, since a substitute already has a certain prior claim to a job.

III. Union Self-Government

One major point that has not been settled in the courts is the union's insistence that its rules, called "laws," are not bargainable—with a few exceptions.

The laws include ITU's constitution, bylaws, and general laws. These are what an ITU man knows best as the union's traditions. The constitution and bylaws establish the internal structure and operations of the union. But the general laws set forth minimum demands that every local either must or "must endeavor" to include in its contracts.

Employers have balked at the union's position on these laws on the grounds that it constitutes a refusal "to bargain in good faith." ITU insists that as long as the negotiators really intend to reach an agreement when they sit down at the bargaining table, there can't be any question of "good faith."

ITU won't let its locals go into arbitration over sections of its law. They can't be touched by anybody outside the union itself, it holds. In general, it takes a dim view of arbitration as anything more than a last-resort method of interpreting contract provisions.

Revising Laws—Actually, though, nothing in the union's laws is immutable, and everything is ultimately in the hands of the rank and file to change. Bylaws and general laws may be amended by delegates to the annual convention, but the constitution can only be changed by a majority of the members polled through a referendum.

What's more, any of ITU's 800 locals can initiate a change in any of the laws by getting the endorsement of 150 other locals. Then the proposition must be referred to the membership. This system of referendum and government by convention has been called a kind of ideal combination of pure and representative democracy. And it is more than just a paper system. It works constantly—sometimes even to the chagrin of the administration.

Internal Politics—Theoretically, anybody can get elected to an international office by getting 50 local endorsements and being chosen in the annual referendum election for officers. But in practice this system has given

way to one that's probably unique in the labor movement. Officers are now elected as members of one of two internal political parties in the union, the Progressives or the Independents. Randolph and his officers are Progs.

This system grew out of a secret organization of officers of the administration in power at the beginning of the century, called the Wahnetas. This group became the Independent Party. Originally, the Wahnetas were formed to maintain control over vacant jobs and extra work for their friends. Later the Independents were associated with the idea of conciliation, arbitration, and, as Randolph puts it, "being good to the boss so he'll be good to them." The Progressives have been the more militant party, but now it is generally conceded that the principal difference between the parties is that one is in and the other is out.

There is practically no patronage to dispense, only a couple of dozen appointed jobs. The president, the best-paid officer, gets \$250 a week. A little power and prestige and a genuine attachment to the union and its ideals seem to be the chief motives for running for office. The headaches are plentiful, and they are likely to increase.

IV. Future Challenge

One of the most difficult future problems will probably be created by technological advances. When the Linotype was introduced in 1890, it was figured to mean the end of typesetting as a skilled craft. But the machine was complicated, required a skilled operator, and constant attention. ITU officials were quick to realize this.

They immediately began bargaining for Linotype jobs for their members. And today the typical journeyman compositor can operate a Linotype, feed and maintain it as well as perform all the rest of the operations in a composing room. The net result of ITU's flexibility at that time is much more printing and many more jobs for its members.

Technology Problem—But adapting to recent developments in the technology of the industry may not be that easy. One of those is the Teletypesetter which uses perforated paper tape prepared somewhere outside the shop to operate a paper's Linotypes. The news wire services have begun to use this system to supply many of their subscribers. And small town papers especially have been using this tape unaltered to print a good share of their columns.

The setup is already hurting ITU; potentially, it is a handy strike-breaking system. There are still a lot of bugs however. It isn't so fast as the old methods, and there are some questions about its economy. Moreover, it still requires someone to feed tape into the Linotypes, make up pages and perform other jobs. As a result, few

jobs have been lost yet, since many papers have turned operation of the system over to ITU members.

But many have adopted the policy of replacing retiring printers with lower paid, unskilled men and women. ITU has already lost some locals as a result. Other new systems, such as the Fotosetter and the Photon (BW—Jan.17'53,p58), also present a problem in that they don't use type.

Separation Snag—Commenting on these developments, one ITU official remarked, a little remorsefully, "In many ways it may prove unfortunate that we gave up the other crafts in the industry." He was referring to the fact that until the 1890s, ITU was an industrial union, or at least a combination of all the skills of the printing trade. But between 1890 and 1910 it set free and helped establish as separate unions the pressmen, photo-engravers, stereotypers and electrotypers, and book-binders.

When ITU stripped itself down to a single skilled craft, it probably put itself in better condition to weather the long series of bitter strikes it called for shorter hours and other benefits. But now it would probably be better able to absorb new equipment and processes if the lines weren't so sharply drawn between it and the other crafts. An industrial printing union could take over any new jobs that came into its plants. Something like this may have been in the minds of its officials when they extended an invitation to join them in 1947 to CIO's Amalgamated Lithographers. Nothing has come of this gesture thus far.

The other crafts in the trade are joined with ITU in the International Allied Printing Trades Assn. The main function of this group now is to administer and

police the use of the familiar union label or "bug" found on much printed matter. Another idea of the group was to try to set all contracts to expire on the same date in an effort to present a united front to employers. But that hasn't gone very far either. One reason is because some of the other unions have negotiated contracts that provide for no wage boosts unless ITU locals win them.

Launching Unions—Some of ITU's pride undoubtedly derives from the fact that it sired the other unions in the trade. It also played a major role in establishing the AFL back in 1881. And in the 1930s, Charles P. Howard, then ITU president, was one of the AFL leaders who formed CIO—though his union was never part of the group.

While ITU itself never entered the CIO controversy, it consistently refused to comply with AFL assessments to fight the new group.

Expanding and Aging—ITU is still growing in membership, though it has lost about 50 locals in recent years. Even the period of the Taft-Hartley act has seen it continue to add members steadily. The union doesn't thank T-H for this growth, however—it credits it to the increase in volume of the industry.

The oldest national union is growing in other ways, too. Its average member is now 49 years old. As more members retire, pension costs will rise. Apprentices don't enter the trade at 15 or 16 any more; they are more likely about 23 years old today.

No one expects ITU to fade away, but it will have to be as pliable and tough-minded in the future as it ever was in the past as it faces the problems of age and technology.

Legends under illustrations not reproduced here:

FLEXIBILITY saved ITU when the Linotype was introduced in 1890. At first the machine was feared, but union leaders realized its complexity and began negotiating for their members to run it. Compositor can still perform all composing-room jobs, though.

(MLCo. Note. The first introduction of Linotype was in 1886. Instances were recorded of threats to sabotage early installations.)

IN THE OLD DAYS before the Linotype, the compositor's basic skill was handsetting of type. Despite introduction of machines, the old craft has remained, and with it a solidarity of the union. Handsetting remains as a composing-room skill.

TOP MAN in ITU since 1944 is smart, tough, devoted Woodruff Randolph.

HEADQUARTERS is this stone mansion in Indianapolis. It houses general functions of the international, but locals have considerable control over their own destiny.

Correction by MLCo. Our Sales Manual readers, who are familiar with TTS progress will challenge the statement (under the sub-heading "Technological Problem") that "there are still a lot of bugs however" in TTS. As a system for wire transmission of composed type TTS has

surmounted its original "bugs." We know that its production rates are "as fast as the old methods" and much faster than average production rates in recent years. "Questions about its economy" seem to be well-answered in the following article from TIME.