Unions have been criticized both for permitting their leaders to hold office for extended periods and for changing officers too frequently. The burden of the criticism is that long tenure produces dictatorship and frequent change produces instability, making for difficult union-employer relations. The growing economic and political strength of American labor unions warrants increased attention to the length of time that their leaders hold office. The following study of the American Flint Glass Workers' Union (AFL) is an addition to the growing body of detailed factual information on this important problem.1

The AFGWU is one of the nation's oldest unions and the possessor of an enviable record of continuous and responsible national collective bargaining. The flint glass workers established their national union in 1878 and nine years later affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. The organization was formed as a multiple craft union and continued as such until 1937 when the "miscellaneous" workers, unskilled and semiskilled workers, were admitted, making it quasi-industrial in structure. As of May 31, 1949, the skilled division had a membership of 7,554 and the miscellaneous division, 25,021.

The AFGWU has been engaged in national collective bargaining since 1888. It currently negotiates with the National Association of Manufacturers of Pressed and Blown Glassware and the Labor Committee of the Glass Container Manufacturers Institute of the United States. Relations between the union and the two employer groups are friendly and constructive. Bargaining with the NAMPBG, the older of the two associations, has been conducted for forty years without an official strike, and with few wildcat stoppages.2 Through-


2. In September 1950, 12,000 members in the NAMPBG hand plants struck for two weeks and a half, winning a satisfactory contract which they had been
out the years the AFGWU has emphasized short-run gains but has also shown concern for the long-run health of the industry.

An examination of AFGWU records reveals this broad pattern of tenure: Change is frequent among local officers and convention delegates. Substantial changes in executive board personnel occur each year. Only rarely, however, are changes made in the national leadership.

Greater turnover is to be expected among local than among national officers in the AFGWU. Local leaders are under continual close scrutiny of their constituents who may insist on changes. Local positions require less skill than do national offices; therefore, more persons aspire to them. Furthermore, local rivals can compete in an election on fairly even terms with the incumbents. These challengers can put their candidacy before all the local members, unencumbered by the union's rule against circularizing the membership.

Every year each of the 150 odd locals for skilled workers and the 100 odd locals for miscellaneous workers elects 11 new officers. A study of the men holding two of these offices, the corresponding and financial secretaryships, shows high turnover, when contrasted with the stability of leadership on the national plane. In the skilled division each year from 1939 through 1948, an average of 30 per cent of the corresponding and 28 per cent of the financial secretaries (of locals which had been in the union the year before) were new officers. Comparison of the officers’ rosters for 1938 and 1948 (using the same locals for each year) reveals that 86 per cent of the corresponding and 82 per cent of the financial secretaries did not carry over.

In the miscellaneous division each year from 1939 through 1948 an average of 51 per cent of the corresponding and 44 per cent of the financial secretaries (in continuing locals) were new to the positions. The records for the miscellaneous division indicate also that 96 per cent of the corresponding and 99 per cent of the financial secretaries in 1948 had not held that post in 1938. Yearly averages, however, show that the proportion of corresponding secretaries re-elected each year is slowly increasing and the proportion of financial secretaries re-elected is rapidly increasing.

Members eagerly seek the privilege of serving as delegates to the separate annual conventions held by the skilled and miscellaneous unable to achieve in conferences in the summer of 1949, February 1950, and summer of 1950.

3. The expenses of convention delegates are paid, usually by the local union, but in rare instances by the national office. The two divisions held a joint convention in 1947 and under the union's consolidation plan will hold joint conventions in the future, beginning in 1950.
divisions. Turnover among delegates is even higher than among local officers, suggesting that the delegate post is passed around. A study of convention rosters from 1938 through 1949 reveals that each year nearly two-thirds of the delegates in each division (an average of 63 per cent of the skilled and 59 per cent of the miscellaneous workers delegates) had not attended the previous convention.

Nor is there a very large number of delegates who are returned to conventions after several years' absence. Of the delegates to the 1942 conventions, only 12 per cent of the skilled and 4 per cent of the miscellaneous workers had attended in 1937. Of the delegates in 1948, 16 per cent of the skilled and 11 per cent of the miscellaneous representatives had been at the 1942 meeting, but only 6 per cent of the skilled and 2 per cent of the miscellaneous workers had attended the 1937 convention.

Thus the number of holdovers from year to year is large enough to give new members guidance and to achieve a stable policy. The proportion of new delegates, on the other hand, is large enough to maintain the flow of new ideas and to give many members the chance to serve.4

The skilled workers elect their executive board members by referendum. The miscellaneous workers choose their board at their annual convention. These men hold responsible and attractive positions. They constitute an advisory board which the president consults when necessary. They negotiate the annual national agreements, decide appeals, watch over and visit locals in their districts, extending aid to them when necessary, and, upon assignment by the president, handle grievances which threaten to produce strikes. The opportunity to represent the union with all expenses paid in the annual bargaining conferences at Atlantic City, and the prestige of the office, make it attractive.

Twelve semi-autonomous "departments," each including members of one broad craft, are represented on the skilled division's executive board. Provision is made for representation from locals in the east and in the west in certain departments, and for representation of various subcraft groups in other departments. There are provisions for each department which prevent a concentration of board members in any local union.

The membership of the skilled executive board increased from

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4. In recent years the number of delegates has been approximately 300, one delegate for approximately 60 skilled workers and one delegate for approximately 140 miscellaneous workers.
55 in 1938 to 64 in 1948. Counting each post every year, and each candidate every time he ran, there were 660 positions and 1,536 candidates during these years, two and one-third candidates for each position. Because of the division into crafts and areas, and differences in numerical strength of the departments, some of these positions were sharply contested, whereas others went by default.

On the average, one-third (32 per cent) of the skilled executive board members each year from 1939 through 1949 were new. In the small, recently established top-of-the-stove-ware department, two-thirds (66 per cent) were new. In the dying chimney department, three-fourths (74 per cent) were new. In the union's strongest departments, mould-making and pressware, the average proportion of new members was much smaller, one-third (35 per cent) and one-sixth (16 per cent), respectively. When boards several years apart are compared, the new personalities predominate. More than two-thirds (70 per cent) of the 1943 board had not served in 1938. Of the 1948 members, three-fourths (73 per cent) had not been on the 1943 board and six out of seven (86 per cent) had not held positions on the 1938 board.

The number of executive board members elected in convention by the miscellaneous workers increased from 32 in 1938 to 45 in 1949. This board too is highly particularized to provide certain representation for workers in five types of plants (hand, combination hand and automatic, automatic, scientific, and general operations), subdivided in most cases into hot metal (molten glass) and cold metal sections. In the hand plants further division between east and west is made, while in the other types of plants representation is accorded locals in outstanding firms. Finally, extra representation for especially large plants is guaranteed.

On the miscellaneous executive board there were 436 positions open from 1938 through 1948 and 725 candidates vied for them. Two-thirds (67 per cent) of the positions were specifically contested. This rivalry resulted in a high proportion of new faces on each year's new board, an average of 43 per cent. Of the men on the 1943 board, four out of five (81 per cent) had not served in 1938. Of the 1948 members, one of six (16 per cent) had been on the board in 1943, but only one in nine (11 per cent) had held the post in 1938.

5. The Office of Defense Transportation ruled out union conventions in 1945. To meet this situation, the AFGWU simply extended for one year the terms of all officers, including executive board members, who were elected ordinarily by the annual convention.
Of the two annual conventions of the AFGWU, only the skilled workers' convention elects the national officers and amends the key skilled workers' constitution. To meet the miscellaneous workers' cry of taxation without representation, the AFGWU, beginning in 1938, permitted the miscellaneous workers' convention to send sixteen of its members to the skilled convention (held later in each year) to speak for it.

From 1938 through 1949 there were 176 of these delegate posts open. Of these, 146 (83 per cent) were contested by 411 candidates. On the average, slightly more than one-half (52 per cent) of the delegates each year were new. Of the sixteen men first elected in 1938, three were in the 1942 delegation and one in the 1948 group.

Of key importance in the functioning of the AFGWU are the eight national representatives. These men service the local unions, help settle disputes, and handle organizing assignments. The skilled position goes back to 1898 and since 1908 the number elected has usually been four. Some of the union's outstanding members, including four who later became national officers, have held this post. The miscellaneous workers elected their first representative in 1943, but won the right to choose four the next year. These are full-time positions with real prestige, and consequently they are jealously guarded by incumbents.

There have been 153 skilled positions open since 1898 and 221 men have sought them, producing contests in 60 per cent of the cases. From 1938 through 1949 there were 44 posts, 63 candidates and races in 64 per cent of the cases. Despite the number of contests, the incumbent was returned to office 93 per cent of the times. Indeed, only in four cases (two of them since 1938) has a skilled national representative been defeated. In the miscellaneous division the pattern is almost identical. There have been 21 posts, 38 candidates and 13 contests — a race in 62 per cent of the cases. Incumbents were re-elected 94 per cent of the times, and only once was a man seeking re-election defeated.

Nineteen men, including the four present occupants, have been national representatives in the skilled division. Eight of these men held the post for ten years or more. One man held it for twenty-six years. Excluding the present representatives, the average length of time in office is nine years. Including the present occupants, it is

6. Beginning in 1950 there will be only one.
7. From 1898 through 1901 there was only one position. After a lapse the position was re-established for four men in 1908. From 1926 through 1931 there were three national representatives; from 1932 through 1935, two. From 1936 on there have been four.
8. No election was held in 1945.
more than eight years. Five men, including the present officers, have been national representatives in the miscellaneous division. Their average time in office is slightly more than five years.

The honor of representing the AFGWU in the AFL conventions always attracts a number of candidates. From 1941 through 1946 the union sent two men each year in addition to the president who is an ex-officio delegate. And each year from four to ten men vied for the post. In this period only one man was elected twice and in his case the elections were five years apart. Beginning in 1947, the union also sent two rank and file delegates from the miscellaneous division, and again the posts were strongly contested with no re-elections.

The national offices are the most important and among the most stable of all positions in the AFGWU. To the rank and file the national officers are somewhat distant, important figures. Their work appears to be difficult and forbidding, although the prestige and salary\(^9\) of their offices are attractive. Rivals are greatly handicapped in challenging an incumbent officer. The current leaders, headed by the president, preside at the national conventions and are well known by the convention delegates who elect them. The present leaders, in line of duty, visit many locals each year and keep their names continually before the membership in the monthly circulars, the national magazine, the quarterly financial reports, the annual proceedings, etc. In contrast, rivals find that the union's laws forbid them to circularize the trade without approval of the national officers, even if they have the funds.\(^1\) Furthermore, the constitution restricts campaigning by making it "unlawful" for any member to seek election "by soliciting or bribery in any form, personally or by representative."\(^2\)

National officers, who have devoted years to the building of the union, are usually middle aged or past and some have not worked in the factory for decades. Few members wish to take the responsibility of forcing their fellow unionists into unemployment. And for one national officer to oppose another for his office is almost unthinkable.

As a result of these factors, there are few contests for national office. Only when a new office is created or when an officer dies so close to convention time that the post is not filled temporarily may a contest be expected with confidence.

The record shows that since 1878 ten men have served as presi-

9. Salaries range from \$4,506.12 for the third vice-president to \$6,789.24 for the president.
1. 1949 Constitution, Article XX, Sec. 2.
2. Article IX, Sec. 15, 1949 Constitution.
dent, four of them for a decade or more. There have been few contests and fewer defeats. There have been 70 elections, 86 candidates, nine contests (13 per cent of the elections), and only two defeats. The last time an incumbent president was challenged was in 1932. At that time Joseph M. Gillooly unseated William P. Clarke in a bitter race. Gillooly had been vice-president for seventeen years, six of which he had served as acting president, while Clarke drew the president's salary and title, but actually worked as president of the union's ill-fated bank.

The first vice-president's post was created in 1880. Since then fifteen men have held the position, three men for ten years or longer. There have been 68 elections, 104 candidates, seventeen contests (20 per cent of elections), and only one defeat. The last contest came in 1943.

The position of secretary has existed since 1878 but was combined with the post of treasurer only in 1909. Twelve men have been secretary of the union, but only one, Charles J. Shipman, for more than ten years. Shipman held the post for twenty-seven years. Over the years there have been 70 elections, 76 candidates, four contests (six per cent), and no defeats. The last time that an incumbent was challenged or that there was a race was in 1899.

The post of assistant secretary was created in 1893. Six men have held the position, three of them for a decade or more. There have been 55 elections, 82 candidates, nine contests (16 per cent), and one defeat. After winning four races for the post, the present incumbent has not been challenged since 1935.

The union has elected second vice-presidents since 1938. During that period three men have served. There have been 11 elections, 14 candidates, two contests (18 per cent), and no defeats. The last contest was in 1947.

The third vice-presidents have been elected since 1941. Two men have held this position. There have been eight elections, 20 candidates, three contests (38 per cent), and no defeats. The last contest was in 1946. These two new positions were sponsored by the miscellaneous workers with the hope that one of their number would be chosen to fill them. And three times single miscellaneous candidates vied for one of the posts, but in vain.

The national officers comprise a stable group. Since the six offices were founded, there have been 282 posts, 382 candidates, 44 contests (16 per cent), and four defeats. Even death and resignations have brought change slowly. From 1938 through 1949 (excluding 1945 in which there was no convention and no election) the incumbent officer succeeded himself in 90 per cent of the cases. This
stability is further illustrated by the fact that the same four men led the union from 1916 through 1931. After the changes in 1932, a slightly different group headed the organization without change until 1940.

The path to high office in the AFGWU has changed as the union has grown older. In the early years men with a background of only local leadership could aspire to any office, even the presidency. Today the road to the presidency is long and it passes through the lower national offices.

Of the forty-eight men who have served as national officers, thirty (62 per cent) entered their post without prior service as a national representative or subordinate national officer. When only the offices of president, first vice-president and secretary-treasurer are considered, twenty-two (59 per cent) of the thirty-seven men who have held these posts were "outsiders." Of the present officers, however, only the third vice-president reached his position without first serving an official "apprenticeship."

For years the union has reserved its highest post as a reward for "long and faithful service." Beginning in 1884 the Flints have elected as president only men who had previously proven themselves in national office. Harry H. Cook, the current union president, had served twenty-four years in various national offices before reaching the top. Mr. Cook's predecessors, Joseph M. Gillooly and William P. Clarke, had served seventeen and thirteen years, respectively, before they became president.

Leadership turnover within the AFGWU has declined as the union has grown older. It is higher in the new miscellaneous division than in the skilled division, but the difference is rapidly vanishing. Turnover is also greater among local than among national officers.

This stabilization of leadership has probably increased the efficiency of the organization, and as yet shows no important signs of stifling the membership's democratic rights. Still there is danger in this "settling-down" process. The reduction of opportunities for important leadership positions tends to reduce membership enthusiasm for active participation in union affairs. Also, long tenure places a heavy responsibility upon officers to keep up a steady flow of new ideas and to maintain their vigor. The current trend for more active union participation in politics may severely test the adaptability of the "stable" leadership of the AFGWU bound by the union's long history of business unionism.

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