

State's fight against unions

February 4 1995

■ Elliott Springs personally appealed to textile workers not to organize.

Citizens of the Carolina Piedmont were tense as Labor Day 1934 approached. The United Textile Workers of America announced that on Labor Day, Sept. 3, they would initiate a drive to unionize all textile plants in the Carolinas. It was feared that violence would follow.

In Rock Hill, one of the larger cotton mill towns, a giant Labor Day parade began forming before noon at the Union Hall on North Wilson Street. The estimated 2,500 striking textile workers, led by industrial and Aragon mill workers, marched four abreast by Cutter Manufacturing Co. (also known as Carhartt's) on West White Street and then up Main Street before returning to Wilson Street where they disbanded.

The closed mills were Highland Park with 253 on the payroll; Industrial Mill 771; Aragon 320; Victoria 207; Wymojo, 106; and Cutter 287. The Arcade Mill was still running but shut down two days later as the strike spread. The Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Co., the town's largest payroll with 1,200 and the Jac Feinberg Hosiery Mill with 150 continued operation.

The parade was orderly with no more than whistling and automobile horns to indicate its progress. The strikers carried American flags and signs such as "Back the NRA" (the National Recovery Act).

Great Falls' large Republic Cotton Mills closed indefinitely. Springs Cotton Mills with three Chester plants (Springsteen, Baldwin, and Eureka); two Fort Mill plants (Fort Mill Manufacturing and White Plant); Kershaw Cotton Mill; and the giant Lancaster Cotton Mill announced they would remain open.

Capt. Elliott Springs, who had inherited the Springs Cotton Mills just three years before, became the major target of unionizers. It was well known that Springs hadn't really wanted to be a mill president.



**Nearby
history**

**LOUISE
PETTUS**

From 1922 until 1931, Springs had been a best-selling and highly paid author. To his credit Springs had six novels, plays, Hollywood screen scripts and hundreds of short stories that appeared in leading national magazines. Union strategists believed that Springs, 38, lacked the experience to cope with a massive assault.

On Sept. 5, "flying squadrons" of union organizers from Rock Hill, Union and Gastonia, estimated at anywhere from 2,000 to 5,000, descended on the Chester plants.

Three companies of the National Guard were called out. Two were part of the 188th Infantry, Company I of Rock Hill and Company K of Fort Mill. The other was the 40-member Lockhart Engineers which was sent to York to protect the Cannon Mills. Two attempts were made by union men to get inside the Cannon plant, but they found that the mill had surrounded the plant with heavy wire fence topped by barbed wire and locked the gates.

The York County sheriff, C.A. Moss, and the York chief of police, J.F. Faulkner, were supported by at least 1,000 mill workers and townspeople who were hostile to the union organizers. A downpour of rain dampened any enthusiasm for a confrontation.

Three days later the Cannon plant was the only cotton mill in York County still in operation. All of the Rock Hill plants, mills in Fort Mill, Clover and Bowling Green and the Neely-Travora Mills in York had shut down. On Sept. 18, the Jac Feinberg Hosiery Mill closed, not because the workers wanted to strike, but they, along with management, agreed it was too dangerous to stay open.

Elliott Springs visited the Springs Mills in Chester, Fort Mill and Lancaster to appeal personally to the workers to resist unionization. In every plant the workers elected to stick by him. National news organizations picked up the story, and soon the World War I flying ace and the 1920s' highest paid short story writer had added a new dimension to his reputation — that of a shrewd and forceful leader of the textile world.

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