

UNASSISTED READJUSTMENT MEASURES

By manufacturers

Readjustment can be thought of as falling into two categories. The first is automatic readjustment. This comprises steps taken in response to pressures of the moment, without awareness of their ultimate impact. This category includes persistence in the status quo, tightening of belts, muddling along and vegetating, in a manner of speaking. The other category includes action consciously directed toward terminating a particular situation, based on willingness to cope with new developments, and acceptance of disruptive consequences of a relatively bold course of action. Fulton County in the main has only made the first type of adjustment.

Leather glove manufacturers have had to adjust to competition from domestically produced fabric gloves and leather glove imports. Some of the larger firms have added fabric gloves to their operation, others are producing fabric gloves exclusively, and some have added certain knit specialty items. Until recently, little research and development has been undertaken by the leather glove industry to improve their product, although substitution of fabric gloves for leather gloves has had an increasing adverse influence on the industry.²⁵

The problem of switching from leather to fabric is not a recent one, however. During the 1930's, management in the leather glove industry became aware of the trend toward fabric gloves but considered it a temporary style-vogue, and made no attempt to adjust its operations to it. The war years, because of Government contracts, proved to be sufficiently profitable without such a changeover. Whatever output could be made available for the civilian market, was readily sold. After the war, the industry finally began to face up to the threat of fabric gloves, and proposals were presented to the local labor unions involving a switch in production to nonleather gloves and in wage rate schedules. But unemployment among glove workers was already mounting. And workers' resistance to a changeover was increased not only because of a threatened displacement of male glove cutters,²⁶ but also because the industry's proposal was viewed as the first sign of decomposition which eventually could affect rate schedules for leather gloves as well. Labor therefore continued to insist on piece-work rates for fabric gloves identical with leather glove piece rates. A number of Gloversville firms are producing fabric gloves, but about four-fifths of the operations are farmed out to various plants in adjoining areas, because of labor resistance to a rate schedule revision.

Managerial inefficiency also accounts for the leather glove industry's difficulties. Between 1940 and 1950, only one leather glove firm in the Gloversville area constructed new plant facilities. The remainder of the industry continued to own plants fully depreciated

²⁵ A new tanning process, which permits leather gloves to be washed more easily, may improve the latter's competitive position somewhat.

²⁶ A majority of workers in all glove establishments are women. In leather glove plants, the ratio is 3 female workers to 1 table cutter (for the highest quality gloves), and 5 to 6 female workers to 1 block cutter (the less expensive variety). The ratio for cut and sewn fabric gloves is similar, if not greater, for cut and sewn fabric gloves.