

AMERICAN LABOR IN THE 1940'S

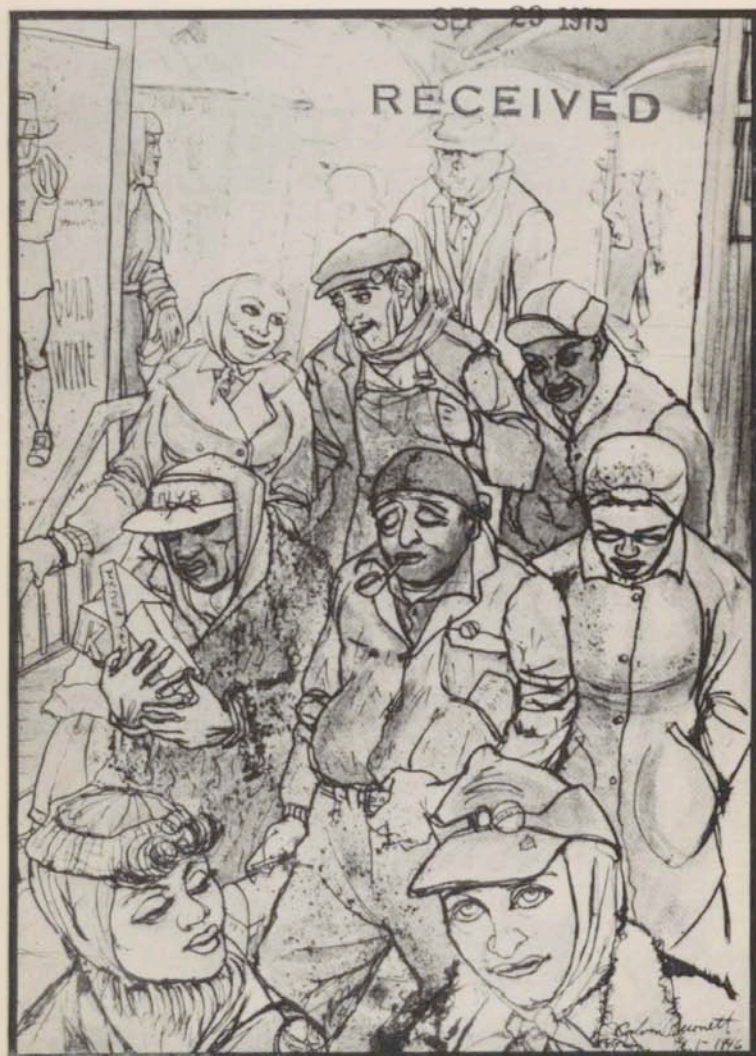
# RADICAL AMERICA

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War Worker Winter. Watercolor by Calvin Burnett

CALVIN BURNETT, born in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1921, teaches at the Massachusetts College of Art. He has written and designed several books, including **OBJECTIVE DRAWING TECHNIQUES**, and has received numerous awards and honors. During World War II he worked in the Boston Navy Yards. He writes:

"Before moving to Boston in 1961, I had lived next door in Cambridge for over forty years. During all that time, Roxbury to me was a place to go. I went to church there; organized and joined community groups there; played clarinet and piano there; taught there, both privately and in the public schools; studied, partied, and exhibited there; and, as these drawings show, sketched and painted there. I can see what has changed and how much it is the same, as I begin on my second half-century of going to Roxbury."

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# RADICAL AMERICA

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# RADICAL AMERICA



*Richmond, California/1942. Dorothea Lange*

## Introduction

There are real gaps in our knowledge of working-class history in the 1940's, and this special issue of RADICAL AMERICA is an attempt to fill them. We also hope to illuminate the immediate historical roots of contemporary, working-class development in the U.S. By examining the continuing growth of working class militancy in the context of expanding labor union bureaucratization, increasing state control of the economy, and pressing divisions within the working class, these articles may be able to provide a close-range perspective on the current condition of the working class. The history of workers' struggles during the Second World War and the early years of the Cold War reveals the enormous obstacles that stood in the way of a revolutionary working-class socialist movement. But the working-class history of the 1940's also shows how and why the capitalist class failed to gain complete hegemony over society and the means of production, even under the most favorable conditions.

While left historians and old militants have begun to reconstruct a critical history of the entire working class in the eventful years of the 1930's, there is still no adequate analysis of the equally significant 1940's. In his bibliographical essay, James Green offers an explanation of this

gap in our knowledge, a gap partially due to the fact that the labor movement seemed to be on the "offensive" in the Depression and in a "defensive" position during and after World War II. The articles in this issue explain why the militant industrial unions of the CIO became more defensive or conservative during the war period, but they also look beyond the organized labor movement to the working class as a whole. This perspective shows that rank-and-file workers actually became more militant during the 1940's despite the growing conservatism of their leaders. Although workers were forced to surrender important economic and political freedoms during the Forties, the proletariat did make substantial organizational gains during the period. These advances should not be overshadowed by the more dramatic victories of the mid-1930's or by the serious political defeats of the late 1940's.

There were several key transformations that were initiated or accelerated during and immediately after World War II. The following developments are of fundamental importance because they helped to determine the condition of the working class in our own time:

I. During the Second World War a tremendous demand for labor developed which all but eliminated unemployment. These conditions of industrial demand and labor scarcity not only permitted substantial growth in both AFL and CIO unions, but they also allowed for a massive influx of blacks and women into defense industries and other centers of wartime mass production. As a result, an unprecedented recomposition of the working class occurred during World War II in which many blacks and women not only entered industrial plants, but also obtained relatively high-paying jobs. Of course, this kind of advance was temporary in most cases because both groups of newcomers were pushed out of the better paying jobs after the war. However, as Paddy Quick's article shows in the case of women war workers, the newcomers were not pushed out of the labor force entirely in the late 40's. In fact, after World War II, women exerted a much greater presence in the labor movement than ever before. Although most of the wartime grievances lodged by women and the civil rights actions launched by blacks came to naught, both of these oppressed groups gained a firm foothold in mass production plants and in industrial unions which became the basis for the more successful fights against racism and sexism that have been waged in more recent years.

II. In addition to important changes in the composition of the working class, the 1940's witnessed an acceleration of the bureaucratic tendencies inherent in the CIO unions. Nelson Lichtenstein's article on the politics of the wartime no-strike pledge explains how CIO leaders formed a compact with government and industry that denied the rank and file's right to strike while it increased the growth of the unions and the power

of the union officialdom. The effects of these conditions upon working-class militants is described in a very personal way in Stan Weir's memoir of his experiences in West Coast maritime and auto industries. Both Lichtenstein and Weir commented on the role played by the Communists within the CIO in supporting and at times enforcing the no-strike pledge and other measures designed to increase productivity. But Ronald Schatz's essay on the electrical industry in the 40's shows that militant industrial unions like the Communist-led United Electrical Workers actually encroached upon management prerogatives during World War II and convinced many workers that the CIO could still defend their interests and extend their benefits without striking.

III. The wartime expansion of the labor bureaucracy (which C.L.R. James called the new "bodyguard of capital") certainly blunted the "revolutionary will of the proletariat," but it did not check the growth of rank-and-file militancy. The massive resistance of the working class to the repressive conditions imposed on it by capital, the state, and the labor bureaucracy during and after World War II is a tremendously important, but frequently ignored, episode in the history of U.S. labor struggle. The great miners' strike of 1943, described in James Green's introductory article, and the wildcats in auto, analyzed by Ed Jennings, represented an unprecedented outburst of rank-and-file opposition to the concerted power of capital, the state, and the nation's leading labor bureaucrats. However, as Martin Glaberman points out in his note on political opposition to the no-strike pledge in the UAW, the militancy expressed in the auto wildcats was limited largely to the shop floor; it was not successfully transformed into a national, rank-and-file movement of opposition to the labor bureaucracy or the ruling Democratic Party. Without minimizing the amazing level of rank-and-file militancy during the 1940's, the articles in this issue attempt to describe the limits of that militancy and to situate it within the political economy of the period.

THE EDITORS





## **Fighting on Two Fronts: Working-Class Militancy In the 1940's**

*James Green*

The working-class militancy of the Depression which created the CIO industrial unions has naturally received a great deal of attention, but the events which followed have not received sufficient attention. What happened to the working-class militancy of the early 1930's? (1) One way to begin answering that question is to explore the relatively uncharted history of labor struggle that followed the formation of the CIO unions. By tracing the events of the late 1930's, the war years, and the early Cold War years of the late 1940's it is possible to examine the continued existence of rank-and-file militancy and, at the same time, to analyze the changes in the composition of the working class, the union bureaucracy, and the role of the state that limited the political impact of working-class militancy. (2)

*Opposite: Women workers bevel armor plating with acetylene torches.*

## RECESSION, RETREAT, AND RESURGENCE, 1937-1941

The late 1930's, following labor's major defeat in the Little Steel strikes of 1937, were a bleak period for the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). With unemployment returning to more than 10 million in the "Roosevelt recession" of 1937, the CIO's membership expanded by only 400,000 in 1938-39 as compared to 3.7 million in the first two years of its existence. The American Federation of Labor, a much more conservative body from which the CIO had split, now surpassed the new industrial union organization in size. Moreover, the level of strike activity in the U.S. declined, with the average number of strikes per month in 1939 being less than half the number for 1937. (3)

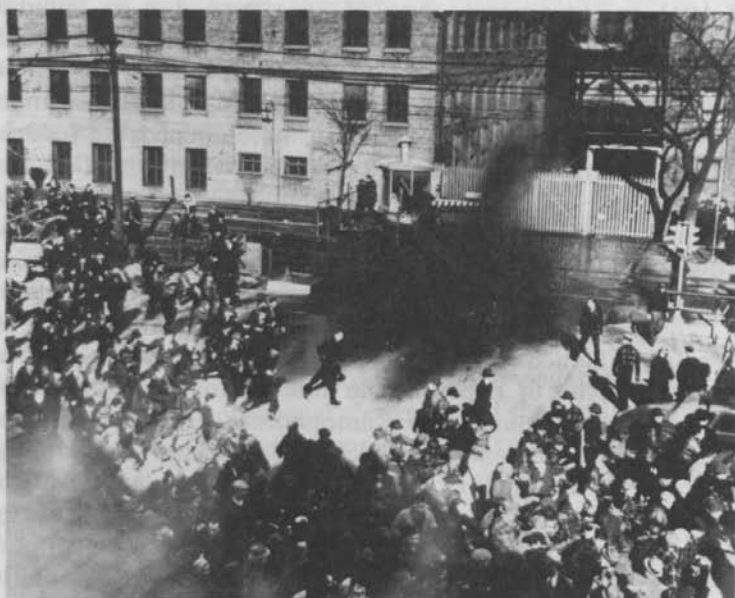
The CIO leadership continued to give political support to President Roosevelt, even as FDR moved to the right in accommodation to the Dixiecrat-Republican majority in Congress. (For example, two million workers on government relief jobs were fired in 1940, despite militant strikes by WPA workers.) Even when CIO president John L. Lewis broke openly with Roosevelt in 1940 and opposed his reelection, FDR won a third term with the nearly unanimous support of other CIO leaders and members. Lewis stepped down as CIO chief to make way for a more moderate protégé Philip Murray. FDR's appointment of Sidney Hillman, president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, to the National Defense Advisory Committee in 1940 indicated the CIO's ties to the administration.

With the U.S. producing war supplies for the Allies in 1940-41, unemployment began to drop appreciably, and workers were in a better position to go on the offensive. Several episodes in this period demonstrated the government's willingness to play an active strikebreaking role with little or no opposition from top union leaders. In each case, the presence of Communists among the strikers was used as a pretext for intervention. The Communist Party was playing a more aggressive, militant role in industry during this period when the Nazi-Soviet pact still held and the CP opposed U.S. intervention in the war.

Less than two weeks after the 1940 presidential election, government agents descended upon UAW strikers at the

Vultee aircraft plant in Los Angeles while the FBI and Attorney General Jackson branded the strike "Red" because of Communist influence in the walkout. In any case, federal harassment and red-baiting could not break the Vultee strike, which was supported by the sympathy strikes of AFL unions in the Los Angeles area, including the building trades then constructing new aircraft plants. When the company quickly conceded most of the strikers' demands, CIO organizing in West Coast aircraft and auto plants picked up significantly.

In 1941 Roosevelt became what Art Preis calls an "open strikebreaker". The president intervened aggressively in a militant UAW strike at an Allis Chalmers plant near Milwaukee, where the Communists again played a leading role. When the company rejected the arbitration offer of GM and the ubiquitous Sidney Hillman, among others, FDR threatened to seize the plant. But this threat, combined with the use of local police and state militia, failed to break the strike. On April 7, 1941, after a 75-day strike, the Allis Chalmers company "accepted terms the union would have



*Allis-Chalmers strike, 1941. State Historical Society of Wisconsin*

settled for in the beginning", including a "maintenance of membership" clause which guaranteed the size of the local's membership.

The next time Roosevelt opposed a strike, he moved with devastating effectiveness. When 12,000 UAW workers struck the North American Aviation plant at Englewood, California in June of 1941, the President ordered in federal troops who effectively broke the strike. Wyndham Mortimer, a Communist organizer who helped unionize the plant, charged that Richard Frankenstein of the UAW International called the strike prematurely and then turned around and joined Sidney Hillman in red-baiting the strike and supporting Roosevelt's use of federal troops. (4) While Philip Murray, the new CIO president, criticized the illegal use of federal troops, the ex-president of the Congress, John L. Lewis, denounced Hillman as a "traitor" who was "standing at Roosevelt's elbow when he signed the order to send troops to stab labor in the back...."

For a time, William Z. Foster and other Communist influentials joined in the bitter denunciation of Roosevelt's strikebreaking actions; but by the time the UAW convention of 1941 rolled around, the CPUSA returned to its Popular Front support for Roosevelt as a result of Hitler's attack on Russia in June of 1941. As a result, the influential CP bloc in the UAW refrained from attacking the pro-Hillman right wing, led by Walter Reuther, which supported federal strikebreaking in the North American Aviation strike. The CP and its allies in the incumbent UAW leadership also took an unprincipled position when the Reuther forces introduced a dangerously undemocratic resolution denying elective or appointive office to anyone who was a member of "any political organization, such as Communist, Nazi, or Fascist, which owes its allegiance to any foreign government." Instead of opposing the measure outright the Addes group (which included the Communists) proposed that the amendment be extended to include Socialists — an attempt to embarrass Reuther, who had once been a member of the Socialist Party. The resolution, which made a pathbreaking linkage between Communism and Fascism, passed and became a precedent for the Cold War measures that would be used to completely purge the Communists.

When the Communists joined other CIO leaders in enthusiastically endorsing the no-strike pledge, its influence decreased among many militants who had looked to the party for leadership. Its strength had already suffered among black workers in 1940 and 1941. According to George Charney, who was CP organizational secretary in Harlem, there was more than "faulty organization" to blame. The party's increased emphasis on foreign policy and its bureaucratic authoritarianism and racial paternalism (about which Ralph Ellison wrote so bitterly in *INVISIBLE MAN*) began to erode the black membership attained by the CP in the Thirties. (5) The Party's reputation also suffered among black workers when A. Philip Randolph (the most influential black labor leader in the nation) resigned from the presidency of the National Negro Congress (a broad front group in which the CP, including many white organizers, played a leading role). Randolph's resignation in April 1940 was coupled with an attack on the CP for controlling the Congress in the interests of Russian foreign policy (still being governed by the Nazi-Soviet pact). (6)

Despite the growing bureaucratization and increasing timidity of the unions, the working class did win some notable victories in 1941. A strike at the giant River Rouge complex forced Henry Ford to recognize the UAW despite the racial divisions and repressive working conditions fostered by the Ford Motor Company. The Ford strike of 1941 not only brought large numbers of black workers into the UAW for the first time (despite the strong opposition of Detroit's black bourgeoisie), it also involved the same daring, militant tactics that characterized the sit-downs of 1936-37 and the GM tool and die makers' strike of 1939. But as James Boggs points out, the victory at Ford, significant though it was, differed from the sit-down strikes, because in 1941 "more workers were organized into the union" than "spontaneously" organized themselves into the union. (7) Similar developments occurred in the Bethlehem Steel strike of 1941, in which black workers played an important role in cracking the Little Steel companies which had smashed the Steel Workers Organizing Committee in 1937. There was militancy in the steel strike, but there was very little spontaneity. Phil Murray's dictatorship over SWOC grew even stronger after the victory over Bethlehem.

Perhaps the greatest victory of 1941 came with the threatened March on Washington organized by A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, to force FDR to open jobs for blacks in the booming defense industry. Despite the opposition of the black bourgeoisie and the reluctance of the NAACP and the Urban League, Randolph was able to use his skill and prestige as a black labor organizer to win the support of Afro-Americans all over the country for an all-black mass movement. Randolph was branded a "traitor" for disrupting the mobilization program and criticized by the Communist Party for the same reasons. But Randolph refused to abandon his threatened March on Washington until FDR agreed to open defense industries to blacks and to set up a Fair Employment Practices Commission.

The victories of the CIO autoworkers at Ford, the steelworkers at Bethlehem, and Randolph's direct-action movement of the black masses capped a year of rising working-class militancy. In 1941, with unemployment markedly receding, more workers went on strike than in any previous year of U.S. history except 1919. There were 4,288 strikes in 1941 (as compared to 2,304 in 1939) involving 2,363,000 workers, substantially more than the 1.8 million who struck in the "explosive year" of 1937, the high point of the sit-downs. When the U.S. declared war in December of 1941, workers entered an entirely new terrain of struggle in which strikes were outlawed and productivity and profits increased at a dizzying rate. And yet workers did not abandon their most effective weapon — the strike — nor did they slacken in their zeal to win the protection offered by industrial unionism. In many ways (only a few of which can be suggested in the following paragraphs) World War II was the most remarkable period in U.S. working-class history.

#### THE WAR AT HOME, 1942-1945 (9)

The AFL and the CIO, including the Communist-led unions within the latter, opposed all strikes during the war and often showed signs of opposing labor struggle altogether. But industrial workers, especially those in the mines and defense plants, refused to abandon the strike

weapon. While most AFL and CIO unions tried to build their unions through government support and take advantage of the labor shortage to encroach on certain management prerogatives, they found that millions of their own members insisted on adopting a more militant, direct-action approach. In any case, the government and capitalist management failed to suspend class struggle during the Second World War.

Full employment, higher wages, and the expansion of union protection satisfied most union leaders and many of their members as well who believed that the labor movement would have to make big sacrifices on behalf of the war effort. Hence the willingness of unions — left, right and center — to sign the no-strike pledge. (10) President Roosevelt, whose popularity increased when he embraced his new identity as “Dr. Win-the-War”, encouraged the collaboration of labor by calling for an “Equality of Sacrifice” program in which corporations, consumers and workers were all supposed to suffer equally in order to support the war effort. This program was a farce. While workers sacrificed the right to strike, and in many cases their right to move freely between jobs, corporations found ways to avoid war taxes and found it fairly easy to get price increases out of the government. Workers found it much more difficult to obtain wage increases. The federal government set wages during the war, in its “Little Steel formula”, on the basis of 1939 cost-of-living averages — a time before the big 1941 strike wave when many workers won significant pay increases, and before the worst effects of wartime inflation began to hit the working class. Wages increased dramatically during the war, but especially after 1942 prices shot up much faster. Workers waited impatiently as their union leaders petitioned for wage increases. It was difficult to wait. In cities like Detroit, the cost of various food items increased from 50 to 400 percent in one month as commercial capitalists took advantage of the desperate new black and white workers who poured in from the South to toil in the Motor City.

In return for the wage freeze and no-strike pledge accepted by union leaders, the federal government agreed to protect union shops and union organization during the war.

The War Labor Board granted the unions a "maintenance of membership" agreement which allowed the AFL and CIO to retain and expand their strength, especially in hard-to-organize industries like textiles. Between Pearl Harbor and V-J Day the total membership in labor unions increased from 10.5 million to 14.7 million. Voluntary cooperation also provided union leaders with a chance to forestall drastic federal legal and military intervention in labor-management disputes. A maintenance-of-membership contract not only assured the union protection for its membership during the contract, it also bound workers to pay their dues, usually through a check-off scheme. This was a financial boon, especially to CIO unions still struggling to remain solvent. However, the maintenance-of-membership contract also bound the union leaders to discipline members who engaged in unauthorized strikes during the contract; this meant that industry and the government could literally use the unions to control militant workers. From the point of view of union leaders, who could increase their authority under the contracts forged by the War Labor Board, the wartime accommodation was a very practical one. (11)

But millions of union members expressed strong opposition to the wartime pact between industry, labor and the government. For example, rank-and-file opposition to the "Little Steel formula" surfaced quickly; it appeared most explosively in the UAW's 1942 convention, where "stamping, shouting delegates forced the War Policy Committee, headed by Reuther, Frankenstein, and Addes, to withdraw a resolution endorsing the sacrifice of overtime pay." Delegates close to the Communist Party were the most ardent advocates of the resolution, and they were loudly booed by a large portion of the convention. This vocal rank-and-file dissent was a harbinger of the direct action a majority of Detroit's auto workers would take against wartime wage freezes in the wildcat strikes described by Ed Jennings.

Eventually, however, Phil Murray and UAW leaders convinced the convention to abandon overtime pay for holidays and weekends on behalf of the "Equality of Sacrifice" program and on the grounds that "this plan would," in Lichtenstein's words, "help organize new war workers through its patriotic appeal." Shortly after Roosevelt persuaded the



UAW to hold the line and limit overtime pay, he acted to freeze workers in their jobs through the War Manpower Commission headed by Paul McNutt, the strike-breaking ex-governor of Indiana. As in the case of the no-strike pledge and the Little Steel wage-freeze formula, FDR succeeded in winning AFL, CIO and CP support for his efforts to limit workers' freedoms.

However, millions of rank-and-file workers who suffered from increased demands on the job and increased costs in the consumer markets turned their backs on these high-level agreements and conducted illegal strikes throughout the war. There were also a few labor leaders who did not join in the unions' compact with government and industry. A. Philip Randolph struggled to keep his March on Washington Movement alive in order to force the Fair Employment Practices Commission (headed by a wishy-washy Southern liberal) to actually hire and upgrade black workers in defense industries. (12) John L. Lewis and the United Mine Workers also withstood attacks on their patriotism and took action against the Roosevelt administration's anti-labor policies. In fact, John L. Lewis pulled the UMW out of the CIO (and thereby weakened the Congress considerably) in October of 1942, because he disagreed with Murray's uncritical posture toward FDR and Murray's reliance upon government intervention in labor disputes. Throughout the war Lewis expressed the independent spirit of the United Mine Workers by attacking the government's troubled efforts to "stabilize" a labor market in which there was an unprecedented shortage of workers. However, as Lichtenstein points out, Lewis's attack on the ambitious bureaucratic efforts of the CIO leaders came ironically out of a traditional "bread and butter" approach to labor-management relations. Lewis's leadership represented militant opposition to the sacrifices demanded of labor during the war, but it did not represent a progressive alternative to the forward-looking bureaucratism of Murray, Hillman and Reuther.

In fact, Lewis did not initiate organized working-class resistance to the wage-freeze no-strike policy of the federal government and the union bureaucracy. He opposed the first unauthorized strikes of his members which began in

Pennsylvania on January 2, 1943. "John L. Lewis, the international officers, and local officials exerted as much pressure as possible to end the anthracite strike which emerged from work discontent at a grass roots level" — discontent that also focused on the UMW bureaucracy and the federal government's labor policy. After ignoring a return-to-work order by the WLB and a thinly disguised threat to use military strikebreakers issued by the Commander in Chief, the striking miners reluctantly returned to the pits at the urging of their local leaders who promised that the UMW would win them a wage increase. According to one historian of this wildcat, the "belligerency" of the miners in the anthracite region "forced Lewis to take a more aggressive posture in contract bargaining throughout 1943; to have done less would have undermined his leadership." (13)

Rank-and-file militancy (based on a serious decline in the miners' standard of living) also pushed Lewis to demand a contract with higher wages for the soft coal miners who, he explained, would actually be forced to take a cut in pay "under the arbitrary and miserably stupid (Little Steel) formula" which chained "labor to the wheels of industry without compensation for increased costs, while other agencies of government reward(ed) and fatten(ed) industry by charging increased costs...." Between 1939 and 1943 food costs had increased over 120 percent, according to a UMW study of 80 Pennsylvania coal towns which was later corroborated by government studies. The UMW president also emphasized the terrifically dangerous working conditions in the mines which continued to kill and maim thousands of miners (including 64,000 killed or injured in 1941 and 75,000 in 1942). He demanded a \$2-per-day wage increase with no stretch-out or speed-up. As soon as Lewis announced the UMW's demands, he was denounced as a "Traitor" and a "Hitler" by the capitalist press and criticized in the DAILY WORKER for "disruption of the war effort and provocation that could only result in irreparable harm to labor...."

While the mine owners refused to negotiate and the federal government applied more pressure, the United Mine Workers remained adamant. Lewis extended the strike

deadline beyond April 1, 1943, but this failed to move the owners or appease the government. When the War Labor Board assumed jurisdiction in the case, the mine-union leader attacked the Board as a "court packed against labor" and simultaneously thousands of coal diggers in Western Pennsylvania and Alabama jumped the gun and walked out a week before the extended strike deadline.

When President Roosevelt threatened to use federal troops to break the strike if the insurgent miners did not return to work by May 1, 1943, he not only failed to intimidate the strike; he provoked far more resistance. On May Day of 1943 the rest of the bituminous miners went out, closing all of the soft coal mines in the nation; it was the largest national coal strike in U.S. history. While both capitalist and labor papers accused the miners of being traitors and while Roosevelt ordered the government seizure of the mines, the UMW remained on strike. The strikers' spirits were bolstered on May 2 when a thousand delegates representing 350,000 UAW members in Michigan voted to support the UMW's strike and its demands, despite the opposition of R. J. Thomas, Walter Reuther and other auto-union leaders. The East Coast UAW conference and hundreds of other local CIO unions followed in passing resolutions supporting the miners' struggle against lowering working-class living standards. While this outpouring of rank-and-file support for the UMW continued, the national CIO Executive Board met in mid-May and took time to criticize Lewis and the striking miners. The gap between CIO leaders and the ranks seemed to be widening into a yawning chasm.

In the face of opposition from labor leaders as well as from government and industry, the miners refused to be intimidated or discouraged. In fact, the miners conducted not one massive national strike in 1943, but a succession of four major walkouts between the spring and the fall.

When a truce negotiated in late May expired on June 1, 530,000 miners refused to enter the pits "without any special strike call being issued". Roosevelt wailed that the striking miners were "employees of the Government" and had "no right to strike", and again he threatened to call out the troops; but the miners simply issued their traditional

folded-arms response: "You can't mine coal with bayonets." After this second phase of the conflict, the coal miners began to doubt that the government could intimidate the miners into submission; but as negotiations resumed and the two parties moved closer to a settlement, the government acted more and more like a strikebreaker.



*Ben Shahn/Library of Congress*

In an additional effort to intimidate the miners, the Democratic Congress passed the first federal anti-strike bill in history (which FDR had suggested in 1941), the Smith Connally War Labor Disputes Bill which gave the WLB the power to subpoena union leaders and make it a felony to even advocate a wartime strike. After the UMW agreed to a negotiating truce and miners began to return to work in late June, Roosevelt infuriated the coal diggers by threatening to draft strikers. In defiance, 40 percent of the miners stayed out for another week.

On June 25 Roosevelt, hoping to make up for some of his strikebreaking activity, vetoed the Smith-Connally Bill, but Congress passed it over his veto the same day. Phil Murray of the CIO and William Green of the AFL, who lobbied against the bill, congratulated FDR ecstatically, even though the President's own idea of desirable legislation included

a proposal to put all workers between the ages of 18 and 25 under the gun of a labor-draft provision. While Murray and Green responded to the veto by pledging renewed respect for the no-strike pledge, the Michigan State CIO convention responded to the Smith Connally Act by passing by a two-to-one margin a measure declaring that it voided their no-strike pledge; they also took the opportunity to call for an independent labor party.

In mid-summer 1943, after the WLB called upon Roosevelt to either force Lewis to sign the Board's compromise contract or seize the UMW's treasury and prosecute its president, FDR finally conceded that he could not coerce Lewis into signing a contract without significant wage increases. But the struggle continued. After a third truce had been called, miners, led by coal diggers in Indiana and Alabama, went out in October without orders from Lewis. By the time the official end of the truce period arrived on November 1, 530,000 coal miners had gone on strike in their fourth official nation-wide wartime strike in one year. After seizing the mines again, FDR ordered Fuel Control Administrator Harold Ickes to negotiate a contract; the operators hastened to do so, granting the UMW most of its demands.

The United Mine Workers had smashed the Little Steel formula in spite of massive federal, state and trade-union opposition. The great miners' strike of 1943 certainly deserves to be ranked with the 1936-37 sit-down strikes as an epic event in U.S. working-class history. The ruling class tried to take advantage of the wartime situation to roll back the gains of the late 1930's through the use of state power and the complicity of collaborationist union leadership, but it failed to crack the last line of working-class resistance represented by the indomitable coal miners of the U.S.

The United Mine Workers' victory in 1943 also encouraged increased labor struggle. There were 3,752 strikes in 1943 involving 1,981,000 strikers. This was a substantial increase in militancy over 1942, when, under the first effects of wartime repression, only 840,000 strikers idled for the lowest number of days lost since 1930. "The number of man-days lost in strikes more than tripled in 1943 over

1942," Preis remarks. It was indeed "obvious" that the war had not ended the class struggle. It continued for the duration of the war and reached unprecedented heights in the explosive strike wave of 1945-46.

In 1944 CIO President Murray continued to call for a rollback in prices instead of strikes for higher pay, but prices continued to rise and so did the level of unofficial wildcat strikes. In 1944 Murray's own Steelworkers Union hit the steel industry with more strikes (most of them unauthorized) than at any time in U.S. history. In one unauthorized strike against American Steel and Wire Company's works in Cleveland, the Steelworkers' Executive Board suspended all the local leaders and the entire grievance committee and put the local into a receivership. The militant local union president was drafted shortly after his suspension.

Although a fourth of the delegates to the Steelworkers' 1944 convention braved the wrath of the Murray leadership and voted against the no-strike pledge, "the opposition," according to one labor reporter, "was a temporary, loose-knit formation which reflected the sentiments of the workers in the mills but had no real program to counter Murray's." (14)

In the UAW, where there had been more democratic union procedures from the start than there were in the Steelworkers Union (which was initially organized from the top down), 1944 saw the greatest level of opposition to the no-strike pledge. It was propelled by the wildcats which Ed Jennings' article describes. There were 224 strikes in the auto industry in 1944 involving 388,763 strikers, an annual record. And despite disciplinary action against the local leaders, rank-and-file opposition to the international "no-strike" leaders spread. It culminated in the historic 1944 UAW convention described by Jennings and Glaberman in which the no-strike pledge was actually defeated by the delegates, many of whom had already voted with their feet by wildcatting.

During the Second World War 6.7 million strikers participated in 14,471 strikes, far more in each case than there were in the CIO's early heyday from 1936 to 1939, and far more than in any comparable period in U.S. labor history.

Many of these strikes were unauthorized wildcats which implicitly challenged the leaders of the CIO and their pact with capital and the state. But while the class struggle continued, indeed accelerated, on the shop floors, in the shipyards and in the mines during the war, it did not become politicized in a socialist direction. In fact, the Democratic Party actually emerged from the war with a stronger hold than ever on the organized labor vote. The remarkable 1944 election effort carried on by Sidney Hillman's Political Action Committee (which included many skilled Communist canvassers) was indicative of the way in which labor's political energy was absorbed. (15) There is no single explanation for the failure of a class-conscious political movement to emerge from the wartime militancy, but part of the explanation certainly has to do with the changing composition of the working class during World War II.

#### NEW OPPORTUNITIES, OLD PROBLEMS: THE ENTRY OF BLACKS AND WOMEN INTO WARTIME INDUSTRY

Although the executive order desegregating defense industries represented a great advance in the civil rights of working-class blacks in general, the order did not guarantee desegregation. (16) But blacks were determined not to follow the government's demand to close ranks and put their grievances aside; they would not make the same mistake they made in World War I. "If we don't fight for our rights during this war," exclaimed one Harlem leader, "while the government needs us, it will be too late after the war." The black press declared the "time ripe for emancipation" and mobilized a "Double V" campaign against fascism and racism. (17)

In the first months after Pearl Harbor, when most defense industries still remained segregated, blacks withheld their enthusiasm and support for the war. Journalists were alarmed at the mood of black people around the country. A black truck driver in Philadelphia was arrested on charges of treason after he was accused of telling a black soldier to get out of uniform because "This is a white man's government and war and it's no damned good." After Pearl

Harbor, a black sharecropper reportedly told his landlord: "By the way, Captain, I hear the Japs done declared war on you white folks." (18)

In any case, most of those Afro-Americans who supported the U.S. war effort did so with a clear lack of enthusiasm, and throughout the war there was mass resistance to segregation in the defense industries and in the armies. The fights against discrimination in unions (often led by the Communists) and public facilities (led by CORE, which staged the first sit-ins in 1942) were just beginning. (19)

At first there was not much competition from blacks in defense industries. By the time of the first Fair Employment Practices Commission report, two years after the defense program began, only about 3 percent of the workers in war production were black, but by November of 1944 this proportion had risen to 8 percent. "Between April 1940 and April 1944," Philip Foner notes, "the number of employed Negro workers had increased by more than 1 million, from 2,900,000 to 3,800,000 men and from 1,500,000 to 2,100,000 women." And, he adds, "more would have been employed had the FEPC really received the backing of the federal government." (20) Nevertheless, this influx of black workers due to the dramatic wartime increase in the demand for their labor aroused the resistance of white workers. For example in the Mobile shipbuilding yards (one of the industries that absorbed the greatest black influx) the FEPC tried to upgrade some black laborers to welders. Encouraged by the company and the League for White Supremacy, 20,000 white workers struck and rioted; this in turn led the FEPC to back down and accept the continued segregation in the shipyards. (21)

In 1943 a wave of "hate strikes" took place in several war industries throughout the U.S. against the employment or upgrading of black workers, climaxed by a violent battle between blacks and whites in the Sun Shipbuilding Yard at Chester, Pennsylvania. (22) Black workers could bitterly testify to the fact that not all of the wartime wildcats were progressive strikes.

Blacks did not always respond passively. As the war progressed race relations became an extremely sensitive area



as tensions increased in the army, which held one million black inductees in segregated units, and on the home front. The first conflicts erupted on stateside bases in the South. Race riots and pitched gun battles erupted across the country from 1941 to 1943, as black soldiers rebelled against segregation and degradation sanctioned by the army and enforced by the white military police. "The growing fear of retaliatory violence by blacks led the governor of Mississippi to request the war department to move all Negro regiments out of his state . . .," writes one historian. From 1941 to 1943 "racial friction, sporadic conflict and finally outright rioting became commonplace at nearly every army base in the South, many in the North and even a few in Australia, England and the South Pacific" as blacks fought back against "discrimination and racist brutality". (23)

In the North, riots broke out in Detroit and Harlem in the summer of 1943. The one in Harlem is described effectively in Ralph Ellison's *INVISIBLE MAN*. Neither of them resembled the race pogroms of 1919; rather, they were prototypes of the Watts and Newark uprisings of the 1960's. (24) "Tired of moving to find the Promised Land, tired of finding the North too much like the South, tired of being Jim-Crowed," writes Howard Sitkoff, blacks in the crowded ghettos "struck out against 'whitey' and his property and symbols of authority." During the Detroit riot "Black mobs stoned passing motorists, hurled rocks and bottles at the police, stopped street cars to beat up unsuspecting whites, and smashed and looted many of the white-owned stores in the ghetto." In response, "white mobs, unhampered by the police, retaliated on all Negroes caught in white sections." (25) Matthew Ward, who worked at Ford during the war, remembered the participation of black auto workers:

It was organized among us that in the community, half of us would work one day, and part stay home, during the riot. Three carloads of workers came by my home and said they were going to work. I got in the car and one of the men asked if I had a pistol. I said mine was left down South.

He said, "Man, you're sure going to need it now." (26)



White members of the UAW were clearly not immune to the racist reaction that swept through Detroit in 1943. In fact, the international often had very little control over locals which opposed the introduction or upgrading of blacks. Nevertheless, black auto workers like James Boggs and Matthew Ward document the changed social relations in the plants that came with the CIO, especially in Ford, where industrial unionism came under wartime conditions. Although Ward writes critically of Walter Reuther's position on the race question and undermines the portrait of racial liberalism painted by Howe and Widick, he also testifies to the changed atmosphere he experienced as a black auto worker :

I was amazed at the change when I came back to the shop in 1943. It was altogether different than it was in 1924 (when he first worked at Ford). Many whites were inviting Negroes to their homes for social outings. Some active unionists would invite us to their homes or come to ours. When the women were laid off... (after the war) they got every telephone number on the line. One white woman came up and said, 'I'm not sorry about being laid off, but I'll miss everybody and the relations we built up. I feel closer to everybody here than I have to anyone in my life before. (27)

The CIO unions generally, and especially the Communist-led unions within the Congress, had a dramatically better record than the overtly racist AFL unions in recruiting blacks and standing up for their rights. (28) But it would be wrong to give the CIO unreserved praise with regard to the race question. (29)

Sumner Rosen offers a useful summary of the CIO record on the race question when he makes these points :

1. The CIO commitment to racial equality, while unquestionable, was pursued more through CIO influence in the general political process than through direct action.

2. CIO affiliates varied considerably in their devotion to eliminating racial barriers to hiring, promotion, and equal treatment on the job. Some lagged behind the leadership (like the Textile Workers who accepted Jim Crow in the South); a few forged well ahead. The latter were not the largest or strongest unions in the CIO. (For example, the Communist-led Marine Cooks and Stewards Union which the right-wing National Maritime Union failed to take over by red-baiting because the old leadership had done so much for blacks.)

3. Most advances secured by Negro industrial workers during the CIO's lifetime were due to dominant economic forces, specifically the acute and pro-

longed labor shortage which prevailed during the Second World War. CIO affiliates gladly capitalized on these conditions to secure concessions for Negro workers from employers.

4. By the time of the AFL-CIO merger the CIO had largely abandoned any vigorous commitment to an improvement in the position of Negroes through direct union action, either in collective bargaining or by internal reform. It did not seriously fight to implant CIO standards of union conduct in the merged organization. (30)

In other words, despite the substantial increase of black men and women in heavy industry during the war, and despite the decrease in the overall wage gap between white and non-white workers that occurred during the 1940's, Afro-Americans only "benefitted to a limited extent" from the wartime defense "boom". (31) As usual blacks were the last to be hired and the first to be fired, and so after the war, many of these new workers lost their industrial jobs. Furthermore, very few blacks had been upgraded during the war, because the FEPC was so weak; in fact, after the war CIO political lobbying (used increasingly in place of direct action or mass mobilization) could not even save the Commission from extinction. During the war black workers penetrated industry in large numbers, and after the war they forced the desegregation of the armed forces (again under Randolph's leadership), but in both industry and the military blacks remained on the bottom. Black foremen and skilled workers were as scarce after the war as black officers. For black workers, as for women workers, the Second World War presented great opportunities in industry and industrial unionism, but by the end of the 1940's, many of those opportunities had been closed off. The same fights would have to be fought over again.

The industrial opportunities opened to women during the war were in many ways greater than those opened to black men. Over 6 million women worked during the Second World War. "Wages leapt upward," one historian notes, "the number of wives holding jobs doubled and unionization grew fourfold." (32) The number of women in manufacturing increased by 110 percent and the number of female workers

in war industries shot up by 460 percent because the latter industries paid much higher wages than consumer or service industries and frequently offered better working conditions. (33) Women met the labor crisis with what a recent historian calls "an unprecedented display of skill and ingenuity." They "ran lathes, cut dies, read blueprints, and serviced airplanes. They maintained roadbeds, greased locomotives, and took the place of lumberjacks in toppling giant redwoods. As stevedores, blacksmiths, foundry helpers, and drill-press operators, they demonstrated that they could fill almost any job, no matter how difficult." (34) As the diaries of shipyard workers in this issue indicate, women workers welcomed the chance to work in heavy industry even though the jobs were often more dangerous and arduous; they were also more challenging, sometimes more exciting, and invariably higher paying than traditional "women's work".

As Paddy Quick's article demonstrates, the myth that women war workers came largely out of the home is easily disproved by the statistics. "Women who had previously been forced to take menial or low-paying jobs rushed into war plants to take advantage of the opportunity" to make higher wages. One government survey showed that two-thirds of the women who held jobs in bars and restaurants at the start of the war had switched to other work by the end. Hundreds of laundries closed down across the country because they could not find women workers. (35) Over 400,000 domestic workers, most of them black, left their jobs in response to the call for war workers, and, as Quick suggests in her essay, the fact that many of them refused to return to domestic work had important implications for female labor-force participation after the war.

The Second World War labor demand also helped to produce a "spectacular increase" in unionization among women workers, from 800,000 female union members in 1939 to over 3 million in 1945. However, as women workers swelled the union ranks, they found their participation limited and their grievances ignored. Few unions with the exception of the United Electrical Workers succeeded in narrowing the wage differentials between so-called "men's jobs" and those traditionally assigned to women. (36) In

fact, some unions allowed for the reclassification of jobs so that women would not receive the same pay as the men they replaced. Furthermore, most unions, the United Steel Workers for example, recognized women's seniority in "men's jobs" only "for the duration of the war". As one government report concluded: "It is assumed by both union locals and the management that in the post-war era women will return to their peacetime activities" (37) — i.e. to what Labor Secretary Frances Perkins called "the homes they left".



Activist women who wanted to participate in union politics had trouble because of the men's prejudices, recalled Stella Nowicki, a CP militant in the Chicago meatpacking industry. "The fellows couldn't believe that the women in the union were there for the union's sake." And, she adds :

Some of my brothers, who believed in equality and that women should have rights, didn't crank the mimeograph, didn't type. I did the shit work, until all hours, as did the few women who didn't have family obligations. And then when the union came around giving out jobs with pay, the guys got them. I and the other women didn't. (38)

For women who were less militant than activists like Nowicki, the situation was far more discouraging:

The women felt the union was a man's thing, because once they (the women) got through the day's work they had another job. When they got home they had to take care of their...children and the meals and the house and all the rest, and the men went to the taverns and to the meetings. .... The union didn't encourage women to come to meetings; they were brainwashed into thinking that this union was only for men. (39)

The unions, with the possible exception of the UE, were also not effective in pushing for day-care and other facilities that would free up mothers for union or political work. Even though government bureaus reported a desperate need for child care and even though industry called for day care as a way of reducing absenteeism (which ran high among women workers), Congress failed to act until the child-care problem reached crisis proportions. And then it only provided assistance for 100,000 more children, when at least 750,000 children of working mothers needed care. The government helped recruit female labor for wartime industry, but discouraged any measures that would have really freed women workers from work in the home. (40)

Of course the problem of child care was connected directly to the fact that government, labor and industry viewed women as temporary workers in heavy industry. In 1943 CIO president Murray made a prediction which "expressed the view of the male union leadership":

Widespread unemployment after the war would certainly affect women workers more than men. Many women are employed in war production and will automatically be dismissed when war contracts are cancelled or completed. As newcomers, they will have relatively few skills and comparatively little seniority. Men's traditional position as family breadwinner will inevitably cause overwhelming pressure to give preference to the fathers and let the women go. (41)

This prediction, couched in the language of inevitability, proved to be an accurate prediction — up to a point. In the eight months after V-J Day about 4 million women were dropped from the work force, especially in the defense industries. For example at the Springfield Arsenal in Massachusetts, “where 81 percent of the women hoped to continue working”, every woman employee was dismissed within a week of V-J Day. (42) But as Paddy Quick argues, the decline of women in heavy industry after the war did not mean a long-term decline in female participation in the labor force. As working-class women shifted into lower-paying clerical or service jobs, and back into part-time menial jobs during the late 1940’s, the total number of wage-earning women climbed back to near its peak wartime total in 1943. And so, with women as with blacks, the war years represented a period of great opportunity in industrial jobs and industrial unions, but many of these opportunities proved to be illusory or temporary. The quantitative increases in wages, labor-force participation, and union membership for blacks and women rarely provided a qualitative increase in personal or political liberty. The wartime labor mobilization of blacks and women altered the composition of the working class and laid the groundwork for an attack on racism and sexism, but these changes could not determine the creation of effective mass movements for black and women’s liberation.

#### RECONVERSION, RETRENCHMENT AND REACTION: THE POST-WAR YEARS, 1946-1950

Although the post-war years and the early Cold War era are certainly as important and eventful as the war years, they do not receive as much attention in this issue, partly because the repression of the left in the unions, the retreat of the CIO and the expansion of U.S. imperialism have been described quite fully in other places. (43) Furthermore, the post-war years really represent a continuation and, in many respects, a resolution of many of the conflicts already identified in the war years.

Restrained by the wartime no-strike pledge, the U.S. working class exploded after the war in a wave of militant



strikes designed to make up for the decline in labor's living standards that occurred during the wage freeze and inflationary upsurge of the Second World War. Despite the growing spectre of unemployment and the reluctance of CIO leaders to abandon the system of collaboration established during the war, U.S. workers launched the biggest strike wave in the history of a capitalist country which at its peak in early 1946 involved 2 million workers and eventually extended to include the coal, railroad, and maritime industries. There was a high level of rank-and-file solidarity and militancy in most of those strikes, as Stan Weir explains in his account of the remarkable Oakland General Strike of 1946.

However, there was not much coordination between the CIO unions involved. The UAW strike against GM headed by Walter Reuther advanced the strongest demands for wage increases and the most radical challenges to management prerogatives (including a demand that GM "Open the Books" to prove that the Corporation could afford a 30 percent wage increase). The United Electrical Workers eventually called out their members employed by GM (as well as GE and Westinghouse), but when the UE broke ranks and settled for the 18.5-cent increase other CIO unions had accepted (including the Ford and Chrysler divisions of UAW), Reuther accused the Communist-led union of "doublecrossing" the auto workers. (45) Eventually, the GM strikers had to settle for the same 18.5-cent increase after a difficult 113-day strike. Although none of the CIO leaders (Communist or non-Communist) expressed the real militancy of the ranks in 1946 (46), Walter Reuther came closest. After the GM strike ended in March, the feisty redhead was propelled into the presidency, where he effectively red-baited his opponents in the Thomas-Addes faction and helped to pave the way for the big Communist purges that followed in the late 40's.

In any case, the millions of workers who joined in the great strike wave of 1946 found themselves frustrated. Although many workers aimed to raise the struggles begun in 1936 to a higher stage, this effort was, according to C.L.R. James, "crippled and deflected by the bureaucracy with the result that rationalization of production, speed-up,

and intensification of exploitation" actually increased; for a struggle at the point of production, it substituted a "struggle over consumption, higher wages, pensions, etc." This was, of course, an important part of the expansion of welfare-state capitalism in the 1940's — "the attempt to appease the workers with the fruits of capital when they seek satisfaction in the work itself." (47) Although some big corporations adopted a more aggressive stance toward industrial unionism, as Ron Schatz shows in his analysis of GE labor policy, other companies found new ways of using the unions to control workers. The efforts unions made to discipline wildcat strikers during the war described by Lichtenstein, were incorporated into the collective-bargaining agreements of 1946 and culminated in the five-year, no-strike contract Reuther negotiated with GM in 1950.



Without diminishing the importance of the wartime wildcats or the 1945-46 strike wave as expressions of rank-and-file militancy, it is important to see how these strikes focused on regaining real wages lost in the war far more than they focused on extending workers' control over the means of production. It is also necessary to note that the wage increases won in 1946 were partially wiped away by inflation. In spite of the meat and milk boycotts working-class women led in organizing with the help of militants like Anne Stein (whose account of the consumer boycotts appears later in this issue), workers generally lost ground

in the post-war period of inflation and reconversion. CIO Oil workers, who negotiated an escalator clause with Sinclair, Rubber Workers, Electrical Workers and Steel Workers, won additional wage increases in 1947 without having to strike (partly as a result of the fact that the industries involved gained enormous profits during the war and especially afterwards when price controls were lifted). But most workers, especially those thrown out of work in the demobilization, were unable to keep up with the rising cost of living. Furthermore, during this whole period rising wages drew workers into new patterns of consumption (patterns personified brilliantly in Harriette Arnow's portrait of Clovis Nevels, the Kentucky-born autoworker in *THE DOLLMAKER*) which made it easier for union bureaucrats to pursue programs "in the realm of consumption" instead of attacking capitalism at the point of production. (49)

Since the "war integrated the American economy more than ever before," Jeremy Brecher writes, "the conditions affecting workers in 1946 cut across industry lines, leading to the closest thing to a national general strike of industry" in the 20th-century U.S. However, since "even simple wage settlements affected the entire economy" (based to a great extent on "defense" spending), "the government took over the function of regulating wages for the whole of industry." Under these circumstances, Brecher concludes, the unions played a role in preventing struggles in various sectors from being coordinated against the pro-business regulation role of the welfare state. (50) Murray actually wanted to continue the no-strike pledge after the war, as did Harry Bridges of the Communist-led West Coast longshore union, in order to win the protection of the state in case capital launched another anti-labor offensive as it did after World War I. But once Murray and his CIO allies realized that they could not stop the strike wave they kept it under careful control. For example, Stan Weir argues that Bridges and the CIO leadership in the Bay area refused to endorse the Oakland general strike because they had no way of exercising control. Although the CIO rank and file refused to allow the no-strike pledge to continue, it did find that the discipline exercised against wildcat

strikers during the war was extended after the war and actually written into contracts. (51) In the post-war period of the permanent war economy all strikes, but especially wildcats, were a threat not only to industrial peace, but also to U.S. "security", which extended to more and more industries which depended upon government protection under state capitalism. But as we shall see, the unions were no more successful in stopping wildcats after the war than they were during the war, because the gains achieved by the union bureaucracy under state capitalism also involved an "intensification of capitalist production" which increased conflict and wildcat strikes at the point of production. While the bureaucracy provided leadership in demanding wage increases and struggled to outlaw wildcats, workers "on the line" continued to assume the initiative in "struggles over speedup". (52)

Despite the numerical gains achieved during the war (when the number of union members increased from 10.5 million to 14.7 million), the labor movement lost political influence, as the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 indicated. (53) Although Truman vetoed the Act and thereby retained the strong support of the AFL and CIO leaders, he and Roosevelt had actually supported some of the provisions that were written into the Taft-Hartley Act. After a Republican Congress passed the Act over Truman's veto, the President used the law to interfere with labor strikes 12 times in the first year of its existence. The Taft-Hartley Act not only outlawed the secondary boycott and restricted labor's right to strike (by allowing the government to impose a "cooling off period"), it also imposed direct government regulation over unions, exposed them to damage suits by employers, and subjected their leaders to loyalty oaths. This last provision, the notorious requirement that all officers sign an affidavit swearing that they were not members of the C.P. (or any organization advocating the overthrow of the government by force), served as the weapon used against the left in the CIO purges that followed. Leaving these purges to his supporters in the unions, Truman turned to the less significant but politically explosive area of "government infiltration" by Communists with his repressive "internal security" which led directly to McCar-

thyism. (54) Needless to say, the repression of the left in labor and government was linked to the development of a more aggressively imperialist U.S. foreign policy which led to a "hot war" in Korea and counter-revolutionary intervention in other countries.

The crushing defeat sustained by Henry Wallace's Progressive Party campaign against Truman in 1948 removed the last "serious challenge" to Cold War foreign policy from the left (55), and the purge of the CP-influenced unions which followed removed the only organized working-class opposition to U.S. imperialist expansion and counter-revolutionary activity. The expulsion of the "Communist-dominated" unions after the 1949 CIO convention also weakened organized industrial unionism in the U.S. According to one estimate, the CIO lost between 500,000 and 1 million members as a result of the purges. (56) And this was clearly related to the CIO's withdrawal from the recruitment of black workers, because after the war the CP-led unions resumed their former role as the most aggressive recruiters and defenders of black workers. (57)

It is important to point out, however, that the CP had seriously weakened its position among rank-and-file CIO unions by its defense of the no-strike pledge and its advocacy of work-incentive programs during the war. This was especially true in the case of black workers among whom the CP "lost prestige", in Philip Foner's words, by opposing Randolph's March on Washington in 1941 and by abandoning its aggressive support for civil-rights activities in the interest of the "war effort". (58) When Browder was deposed in the summer of 1945 and Foster took over, the CP unions began to aggressively recruit black workers again, but this effort was frustrated by the abandonment of a brief effort to fight for the super-seniority of black war workers (which attracted considerable Afro-American support) and a return to an outmoded "black belt nation" policy which removed the Party from many anti-discrimination struggles within unions and industries. (59)

Under Willian Z. Foster's new leadership the Communist Party launched an aggressive attack on Truman's foreign policy, and after reconstituting itself as a party (it had disbanded to form a Political Association in 1944) the CP as-

served its "independence" by championing Henry Wallace's Progressive Party campaign in 1948. (60) However this campaign, rather than being aimed directly at workers, called for a return to the Popular Front of the New Deal and World War II period in which peaceful coexistence and coalition reform politics would return. (61) Truman could easily harken back to the Roosevelt legacy to retain his labor support (which he enhanced by vetoing the Taft-Hartley Act), and since he was faced with a Dixiecrat challenge in the South, he could pursue a more liberal civil-rights program which increased black support. Since Wallace could offer little more to organized labor except a will-o-the-wisp promise to provide full employment, the Progressive campaign received very little union support. (62) Even the rank and file of the UE balked at supporting Wallace, who ended up with barely a million votes. (63)

Meanwhile the Communists had done very little to prepare themselves for the attacks they faced in the CIO. Foster's aggressive new leadership had increased the party's working-class membership (which had been reduced during the war), but while the CP pursued an aggressive attack on Truman's Cold War foreign policy and asserted its political independence by supporting Wallace, it still called for a coalition politics within the CIO. This meant a continued alliance with the Murray-Hillman center, the very group that was plotting to join the hard-line anti-Communists to purge the left. (64) As James Prickett points out, the party had little choice but to depend upon the protection of Murray (who had seemed conciliatory in 1946) because the CP did little to "build socialist consciousness in the rank and file" during the Popular Front, and hence when the purges came the Communists were unable to organize rank-and-file support in their own defense. (65) As James Weinstein remarks in a recent review of James Matles' history of the UE, the Communists adopted a conventional trade-union approach throughout the Popular Front period (before, during and after the war) and always kept their socialism a "private" affair. (66) In other words the Stalinized Communist Party was essentially the same party under Foster as it was under Browder. At no point during the 1940's was it willing or able to provide revolutionary leadership for

the rank-and-file militancy that continued at high levels throughout the period.

In other words, the purge of the Communist-dominated unions hurt the CIO by eliminating some of its most aggressive organizers and some of its most progressive leaders, but it did not deprive the working class of potentially revolutionary leadership. (67) The repression of the CP, the bureaucratization of the CIO, and the growing intervention of the state in labor struggles under the Taft-Hartley Act should seemingly have put a damper on working-class militancy, but it did not.

Strikes did decrease in 1947-48, and there were more strikes lost in those years as well; but in 1949, as Phil Murray called publicly for new harmony in industrial relations based on class collaboration, workers launched another big strike wave, one that almost equaled the great 1946 upsurge. The militant coal miners again led the strike wave; they were joined by 500,000 of Murray's own steel workers, by the United Rubber Workers, and by Reuther's increasingly rebellious United Auto Workers (who started launching unauthorized wildcats against speedup). Braving the effects of increased unemployment, the threat of new court injunctions under the Taft-Hartley Act, and the demoralizing effects of the red purges (which hurt many workers who were not CP members and gave many AFL and CIO officers an excuse to act more conservatively), over three million workers struck in 1949.

Once again the actions of rank-and-file workers diverged from the policies adopted by the leaders of organized labor whose relentless red-purge policy caused a decline in CIO membership for the first time (it dropped to 3.7 million in 1949) and created the possibility for what Preis calls "closer collaboration between CIO leaders and the corporations". "Freed from the restraints" that would have been imposed by the existence of a large, organized left opposition, "the CIO officialdom could proceed to contractual concessions they would not have dared to accept before the split," he notes. "These were epitomized by the five-year no-strike contract Walter Reuther signed with General Motors" in 1950. Under these circumstances, it is especially noteworthy that working-class militancy continued at

a high level after 1949 and throughout the Korean War. In spite of widespread jingoism and labor-baiting, U.S. workers refused to allow the Korean War and the Taft-Hartley Act to deprive them of their right to strike.

There were 4,843 strikes in 1950 (more than in 1949 and more than in the big year of the sit-downs, 1937). In fact, there were more strikes during the Korean War (4,847) involving more workers (2.6 million) than there were in the 1935-1939 period, and there were far more strikes than there were in the much longer period of World War II. Furthermore, as Preis explains, the strikes of the late 1940's and the Korean War years were not for union recognition, like those of the 1930's, or merely for wage increases, like many of the World War II strikes; they were large national strikes that involved not only wage increases but "shorter hours, improved working conditions, health and welfare funds, pensions, and other benefits". There were also more "unauthorized work stoppages" against speed-up (especially in auto) which prefigured the struggles of recent years.

What is the explanation for the fact that this continuing level of rank-and-file militancy failed to take a more organized form or a more coordinated class-conscious direction? The bureaucratization of the CIO emphasized by C.L.R. James, the "misleadership" of collaborationist union and CP leaders stressed by Art Preis, and the purge of the left in the late 40's upon which the CP-oriented historians and participants focus are all relevant factors (68), but not sufficient explanations for what happened to the U.S. working class in the 1940's. And this is because all of these interpretations, to varying degrees, center on the history of unions and political parties which never included a majority of the working class at any point in this period. For a more complete view of what happened to workers during and after World War II we must look into the working class itself. There are several factors which must be explored from the bottom up in order to explain why the working class, despite its remarkable militancy, remained on the defensive in this era.

Stan Weir sums up the situation this way based on his experience as a worker and revolutionary activist:



The 1946 strike wave, the biggest of all time, was a momentary return to the pre-war period that had such a wonderful confidence that the movement would result in progressive social change. During 1946, and in '47 and '48, there was 'militancy'. There were thousands who were seeking change, but we were not operating from strength. Our pre-war power was based on our close knowledge of and familiarity with the people we worked and lived around.... The war removed us from those people and changed our world so drastically that we could not act with a sense of knowing that we were going to make it. (69)

The first problem Weir emphasizes in this comment relates to the transiency and volatility of the working class during the war years when there was a breakup of the "primary work groups" that had been so important in the grassroots organization of the CIO. These "work families" did not disappear entirely after 1942. (70) In fact, as Weir's work vignettes from the 40's suggest, they continued to be foci of working-class militancy (sociologists like George Homans emphasized this in their wartime studies of wild-cat strikes) and loci of shop-floor mutuality described by Weir and others. (71) But during the war years and the late 1940's they functioned as cells of organization in a guerilla war that was often waged against union bureaucracies as well as capitalist companies. The shop-floor story told in K. B. Gilden's novel BETWEEN THE HILLS AND THE SEA (which seems to be about a GE plant in Bridgeport) captures this feeling exceptionally well. (72) After 1942 the primary work groups were no longer working as much for the organization of the CIO (which tended to follow the SWOC top-down pattern); instead they often functioned against the unions or parallel to the unions, providing points of reference and self-activity for workers that they could not find in the increasingly bureaucratized unions of the CIO. Perhaps, as David Brody suggests in a recent essay on rank-and-file labor history, the absence of a strong shop stewards' movement in the U.S. meant that workers here lacked the kind of independent leadership of shop-

floor militancy British workers enjoyed. (73) In other words, outside of the informal work groups, which tended to be very transitory in their behavior, the rank and file lacked an organizational alternative to the leadership of the international union bureaucrats and the local machine leaders who served them.

A second problem related to the question of transiency involves the changed composition of the working class as a result of influx of blacks and women during the war. This development obviously created serious problems not only in terms of union solidarity, but in terms of shop-floor solidarity. It would be a mistake to assume that company manipulation and union discrimination were solely responsible for the racism and sexism of veterans of industry or of veterans in the military (who often supported their officers' efforts to relegate blacks and women to subservient roles in the armed forces). Although some shop-floor militants like Stella Nowicki and Sylvia Woods stuck with the union and used it to do some good for other women and blacks (74), most of the new entries into industry found the unions unresponsive to their grievances, unwilling to organize in certain areas (like the South), and unwilling to defend their jobs in post-war layoffs. There was not significant rank-and-file opposition to the unions' racist, sexist policies from white males. As a result the organizational gains the CIO made against blacks and women in certain wartime industries were often temporary, and in the end they did not significantly advance the integration of the class across race and sex lines. Great strides were made during the war by people like Nowicki and Woods that made possible the rank-and-file movements of black and women workers in the last decade, but they were just beginning in the war years, when "special" minority demands seemed even more divisive than they do today.

A third factor among many relates to wartime patriotism and jingoism, which, as Quick points out, is hard to quantify. The wildcats in auto and the miners' strikes during the war certainly indicated that many workers were not willing to abandon the class struggle, but millions of other workers did obey the demands of their bosses, union leaders and government officials because they were willing to

sacrifice for the war effort. Even the auto workers who boldly wildcatted in violation of the no-strike, and refused to re-endorse the pledge at their 1943 convention, turned around and reaffirmed the pledge in a 1944 referendum. Marty Glaberman, who is writing a book on this fascinating experience, explains the apparent paradox in the auto workers' behavior by noting that "what seemed reasonable to them in their role as citizens, sitting in their own living rooms, listening to the war news, seemed quite unreasonable in their role as workers, in direct contact with their fellow workers and with the managerial hierarchy in the plants." (75) In other words the class struggle continued on the shop floor, where militancy often won out over patriotism (at least in the mass-production industries); but in the realm of political society, where the worker saw herself or himself primarily as a citizen, patriotism or even jingoism became more important than class consciousness. Although far more workers wildcatted during World War II than at any previous time in U.S. labor history, there was much less political opposition to the Second World War than there was to the First, during which the Debsian Socialist Party mobilized significant working-class resistance on traditional Marxist grounds. In World War II the Trotskyist parties (one of which Harvey Swados describes in his mistitled novel *STANDING FAST*) (76) suffered from repression and isolation; they were not strong enough before the war to mobilize significant working-class resistance to imperialism during the hostilities. And of course the Communist Party took a militantly pro-war position in opposition to working-class militancy; it in fact adopted the opposite stand from the one so strongly advocated by the Socialist Party of America in World War I. As Stan Weir points out, the Communists participated fully in the jingoistic pro-war propaganda which branded domestic radical critics (even those like Philip Randolph who supported the war) as fifth columnists and "Trotskyite traitors". Ironically, the jingoistic patriotism and militarism the CP pushed during the war would soon be turned against the Communists when the Cold War began and clever opportunists like Reuther (who had likened Communism to Nazism as early as 1941) easily turned workers'

fears of fascist totalitarianism into fears of communist totalitarianism.

In a political sense workers were clearly on the defensive at the end of the decade, and in Stan Weir's terms they were on the defensive for the entire period after 1941, except for the 1946 strike wave. And in an economic sense they were partially on the defensive: they had to battle giant corporations, an anti-labor government, and sometimes their own union leaders to hang onto their hard-won gains, which had, according to the wishful thinking of academic sociologists, made them "middle class". But the level of rank-and-file militancy that existed throughout the 40's suggests that workers were not entirely on the defensive; it was rare after 1941 to see a strike "broken or smashed by direct violence". More subtle and sometimes more effective methods could be used by weaving "legal nets" to "entangle the unions in delaying procedures of courts and government agencies"; but, as Preis remarks, the "relationship of class forces" had changed to the point "that mere legal devices did not suffice to strangle organized labor". "Determined mass action by union workers could tear gaping holes in the legal net, as the miners proved more than once," he concludes. The destruction of the left, the coincident stagnation and bureaucratization of the CIO, the development of new repressive measures by the state, the strengthened position of capital in the Cold War era, and the continuing problems of sexism and racism which the unions reinforced, meant that the working class faced more imposing obstacles in 1951 than it faced in 1941. But as the post-war strike waves indicated, the strength of the working class cannot be measured solely by the nature of its organization in unions and political parties or by the opposing force of capital and the state. Workers were put on the defensive time and again during the 40's, but they never surrendered their most tested weapon (the strike), and they never surrendered the most important material gains they won in the 30's.

## FOOTNOTES

1. For an explanation of how rank-and-file militancy built the CIO in the early years of the Depression, see "Workers' Struggles in the 1930's", a special issue of *RADICAL AMERICA*, Vol. 6, No. 6 (November-December 1972). David Brody suggests some interesting answers to the question of what happened to the militancy of the early CIO in his review essay "Radical Labor History and Rank-and-File Militancy", *LABOR HISTORY* (Winter 1975), pp. 117-126. But he does not explore the importance of what happened to workers during the war.

2. The author would like to thank Frank Brodhead, Nelson Lichtenstein, Jim O'Brien, and Stan Weir for their helpful comments and criticisms.

3. Most of the factual information in this section is drawn from Art Preis, *LABOR'S GIANT STEP: TWENTY YEARS OF THE CIO* (New York: Pathfinder, 1964). All quotations are from Preis unless cited otherwise. For a critical discussion of the end of the New Deal, see Barton J. Bernstein, "The New Deal: The Conservative Achievements of Liberal Reform", in B. J. Bernstein, ed., *TOWARDS A NEW PAST* (New York: Pantheon, 1968), esp. pp. 277-278.

4. See Wyndham Mortimer's own account of the North American strike in *ORGANIZE: MY LIFE AS A UNION MAN* (Boston: Beacon, 1971), Chapter 12.

5. See George Charney, *A LONG JOURNEY* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1968), esp. pp. 115-116.

6. See Jervis Anderson, A. PHILIP RANDOLPH (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1972), pp. 234-239.

7. James Boggs, *THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: PAGES FROM A NEGRO WORKER'S NOTEBOOK* (New York: Monthly Review, 1963), p. 17.

8. For a full account of the March on Washington Movement, see Herbert Garfinkel, *WHEN NEGROES MARCH: THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON MOVEMENT IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS FOR FEPC* (New York: Atheneum, 1959).

9. Factual information in this section, along with quotations (unless cited otherwise) is drawn from Preis, *LABOR'S GIANT STEP*, Part III.

10. Joel Seidman, *AMERICAN LABOR FROM DEFENSE TO RECONVERSION* (Chicago, 1963, out of print) provides a view of the political economy of the war in which organized labor functioned.

11. *IBID.*, pp. 106-107, and Nelson Lichtenstein, "The Union Security Problem During World War II", unpublished manuscript.

12. Garfinkel, *WHEN NEGROES MARCH*, Chapters IV-V.

13. J. R. Sperry, "Rebellion Within the Ranks: Pennsylvania Anthracite, John L. Lewis, and the Coal Strikes of 1943", *PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY* (July 1973), pp. 294-295.

14. Clinton S. Golden and Harold S. Ruttenberg, *THE DYNAMICS OF INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY* (New York: Harper, 1942, out of print) explores early hierarchical developments in SWOC. The interview with

Nick Migas in Alice and Staughton Lynd, eds., *RANK AND FILE* (Boston, Beacon, 1973), p. 170, explains how locals lost autonomy in the Steelworkers Union after 1942.

15. For a study of one local labor party with independent socialist politics, see Staughton Lynd, "A Chapter from History: The United Labor Party, 1946-1952", *LIBERATION* XVIII (December 1973), pp. 38-45. On PAC's activities in the 1944 congressional elections, see Seidman, *AMERICAN LABOR FROM DEFENSE TO RECONVERSION*, p. 337. Also see Joseph R. Starobin, *AMERICAN COMMUNISM IN CRISIS, 1943-1957* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1972), pp. 72-75, for an account of why the Communist Party dissolved in 1944 to become a political association which collaborated very closely with Roosevelt and the Democrats.

16. Garfinkel, *WHEN NEGROES MARCH*, pp. 92-96, 162-178.

17. Howard Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy and Inter-racial Violence in the Second World War", *JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY* (December 1971), pp. 662-663.

18. Quoted in Richard Dalfiume, ed., *THE NEGRO IN THE NEW DEAL AND WORLD WAR II* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969), p. 286.

19. On the first CORE sit-ins and bus rides which prefigured the civil-rights movement of the late 50's and early 60's, see August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A STUDY IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford, 1973), pp. 12-15, 26-27, 34-38. For a discussion of blacks' ambivalent attitude toward the war, see Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy...in the Second World War", pp. 661-663.

20. Philip S. Foner, *ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE BLACK WORKER* (New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 243.

21. *IBID.*

22. *IBID.*, pp. 265-267.

23. Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy", p. 669.

24. Foner, *ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE BLACK WORKER*, pp. 255, 258, and Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy", pp. 669-675.

25. *IBID.*

26. Matthew Ward, *INDIGNANT HEART* (New York: New Books, 1952, out of print), pp. 105-106.

27. *IBID.*, p. 109.

28. Foner, *ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE BLACK WORKER*, pp. 264, 278-280.

29. For a black worker's criticism of one of the most progressive unions — the UAW — see Ward, *INDIGNANT HEART*, p. 153.

30. Sumner Rosen, "The CIO Era, 1935-1955", in Julius Jacobsen, ed., *THE NEGRO AND THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1968), pp. 189-190.

31. Seidman, *AMERICAN LABOR FROM DEFENSE TO RECONVERSION*, p. 165.

32. William H. Chafe, *THE AMERICAN WOMAN: HER CHANGING SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ROLES, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford, 1972), pp. 139-140. Most of the statistics on women workers in this section are drawn from this useful summary.

33. The fact that women were winning better working conditions, sometimes through extending protective legislation, helps to explain why women trade-union leaders opposed the Equal Rights Amendment which gained widespread support in 1944. *IBID.*, pp. 187-188, explains sources of support for the ERA. Leila J. Rupp, "A Reappraisal of American Women in a Men's War, 1941-1945", an unpublished paper read at the Berkshire Conference on Women's History, Cambridge, 1975, also contains an interesting discussion of the wartime fight over the ERA.

34. Chafe, *THE AMERICAN WOMAN*, pp. 137-138.

35. *IBID.*, pp. 142-143.

36. Gladys Dickson, "Women in Labor Unions", *ANNALS* (May 1947), p. 73.

37. Ethel Erickson, "Women's Employment in Steel, 1943", *BULLETIN OF THE WOMEN'S BUREAU* #192-5 (Washington, 1944), p. 83.

38. Stella Nowicki quoted in Lynd and Lynd, *RANK AND FILE*, p. 83.

39. *IBID.*, p. 84.

40. Howard Dratch, "The Politics of Child Care in the 1940's", *SCIENCE & SOCIETY* (Summer 1974), pp. 184-185. The poor quality of day care provided during the war also turned many working-class women against the idea in general.

41. Murray quoted in *IBID.*, pp. 186-187. Unlike female union leaders who were worried about losing protective legislation for women, male union leaders probably opposed the ERA during the war because it would have provided stronger legal safeguards for women workers who wanted the same jobs men had with the same pay.

42. Chafe, *THE AMERICAN WOMAN*, pp. 179-181.

43. This section also draws its factual information primarily from Preis, *LABOR'S GIANT STEP*, Chapters 23-33. Quotations are from Preis unless cited otherwise.

44. For a favorable view of Reuther's leadership in the 1946 strike, see Irving Howe and B. J. Widick, *THE UAW AND WALTER REUTHER* (New York: Random House, 1949, out of print), pp. 137-152. For a critical view, see James R. Prickett, "Communism and Factionalism in the UAW, 1939-1947", *SCIENCE & SOCIETY* (Summer 1968), pp. 268-270.

45. For both sides of the controversy over UE's role in the 1946 GM strike, see *IBID.*

46. See Brecher, *STRIKE!*, p. 230.

47. C.L.R. James, *STATE CAPITALISM AND WORLD REVOLUTION* (Detroit: Facing Reality, 1950), p. 41.

48. *IBID.*, p. 41.

49. The quote about consumption is from *IBID.*, p. 41. Arnov's wonderful novel *THE DOLLMAKER* (New York: Avon, 1954) is mainly about Gertie Nevels, who, unlike her husband, Clovis, is unwilling to abandon rural, craft-oriented values to become a modern consumer.

50. Brecher, *STRIKE!*, p. 230.

51. *IBID.*

52. James, *STATE CAPITALISM AND WORLD REVOLUTION*, p. 41.

53. Seidman, AMERICAN LABOR FROM DEFENSE TO RECONVERSION, p. 280.

54. See Richard Freeland, THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE AND THE ORIGIN OF McCARTHYISM: FOREIGN POLICY, DOMESTIC POLITICS, AND INTERNAL SECURITY, 1946-1948 (New York: Knopf, 1971), and Athan Theoharis, SEEDS OF REPRESSION (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1971).

55. Norman D. Markowitz, THE RISE AND FALL OF THE PEOPLE'S CENTURY: HENRY A. WALLACE AND AMERICAN LIBERALISM, 1941-1948 (New York: MacMillan Free Press, 1973), p. 296. This is the best left analysis of the Wallace movement.

56. F. S. O'Brien, "The Communist-Dominated Unions in the U.S. Since 1950", LABOR HISTORY (Fall 1968), pp. 204-206.

57. Foner, ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE BLACK WORKER, Chapter 19.

58. IBID., pp. 278-280. Foner also suggests that the CP "lost prestige" among black workers during the war by failing to protest against the incarceration of Japanese-Americans in concentration camps.

59. Rosen, "The CIO Era", pp. 198-199, and Nathan Glazer, THE SOCIAL BASES OF AMERICAN COMMUNISM (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1961, out of print), pp. 125-126, 175-176.

60. See Starobin, AMERICAN COMMUNISM IN CRISIS, pp. 177-194.

61. See Markowitz, THE RISE AND FALL OF THE PEOPLE'S CENTURY.

62. IBID., p. 276.

63. See Charney, A LONG JOURNEY, pp. 174-178, and A. Richmond, A LONG VIEW FROM THE LEFT (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), pp. 291-294, for CPers' retrospectives on the failure of Wallace's campaign.

64. Starobin, AMERICAN COMMUNISM IN CRISIS, pp. 138-139.

65. James R. Prickett, "Some Aspects of the Communist Controversy in the CIO", SCIENCE & SOCIETY (Summer-Fall 1968), p. 315.

66. James Weinstein, "The Grand Illusion" (a review of James Matles and James Higgins, THEM AND US: STRUGGLES OF A RANK-AND-FILE UNION), SOCIALIST REVOLUTION (forthcoming).

67. The CIO unions also became less democratic as a result of the purge. This is one of the few criticisms Walter Reuther's social-democratic defenders make of his leadership in the UAW. See Howe and Widick, THE UAW AND WALTER REUTHER, pp. 263, 267-268.

68. For a CP-oriented history of the period which stresses the primary role of repression, see Richard O. Boyer and Herbert M. Morais, LABOR'S UNTOLD STORY (New York: U.E., 1955), Chapter XI.

69. Stan Weir, letter to the author, June 23, 1974.

70. See the interview with Weir in Lynd and Lynd, RANK AND FILE, pp. 196-199.

71. Jerome F. Scott and George Homans, "Reflections on Wildcat Strikes", AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY REVIEW (June 1947), pp. 270-282, and Stan Weir, "Work in America: Encounters on the Job", RADICAL AMERICA, Vol. 8, No. 4 (July-August 1974), pp. 99-108.



72. The Gilden novel shows how the guerrilla warfare continued in the electronics industry after Boulwarism was introduced. It provides the best available look at shop-floor life in the late 40's.

73. See Brody, "Radical Labor History and Rank-and-File Militancy", pp. 123-124.

74. Lynd and Lynd, RANK AND FILE, pp. 67-88, 111-130. Sylvia Woods, a black auto worker who became active in the UAW during the war, explained that she "only joined the union for what it could do for black people."

75. Martin Glaberman, Review of FALSE PROMISES by Stanley Aronowitz in LIBERATION (February 1974), p. 38.

76. Also see Stan Weir's much more constructive criticism of the Workers' Party in RADICAL AMERICA, Vol. 6, No. 3 (May-June 1972), pp. 31-37. Weir reviewed the Swados novel in WORKERS' POWER and criticized it for being apolitical and defeatist.

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**FREE LABOR  
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## **Defending the No-Strike Pledge: CIO Politics during World War II**

*Nelson Lichtenstein*

During the Second World War the new industrial unions born in the mid-30's achieved much that would characterize them in the postwar era. National trade-union membership increased from about 9 to 15 million while the CIO just about doubled in size as mass-production war industries expanded. Anti-union holdouts like Ford, Little Steel and some meatpackers were brought under contract and collective bargaining was "routinized" under the aegis of a powerful War Labor Board. For the first time many union-management negotiations began to take place on an industry-wide basis and "fringe" issues like vacation pay, shift bonuses and pensions were put on the bargaining table.

Of course all this growth and consolidation took place under the most extraordinary circumstances. Depression-era levels of unemployment virtually evaporated as the economy was mobilized and then regimented as never before. The nation was at war, and all institutions in Ameri-

can society were expected, and if necessary compelled, to conform to a patriotic consensus. As its contribution to the war effort the CIO offered the government an "unconditional no-strike pledge" for the duration of the conflict. By exploring the ideology behind this industrial "burgfrieden", this essay will try to show how the enforcement and defense of the pledge contributed to the general decline in political independence and militancy of the industrial unions and advanced a pattern of internal bureaucratization during and after the war.

An assessment of the impact of the wartime no-strike pledge can only be made in light of the CIO's prewar character and potential. Something of a debate now swirls about this issue. Before the 1960's most American historians called industrial unions of the depression era militant and radical because of their use of the sitdown tactic, their mass activity and the influence of Communists and Socialists within their ranks. (1) In recent years, however, a number of commentators, including but not limited to the "new left", have called attention to the conservative origins of the CIO, or at least of its early leadership. Writers as different as Ronald Radosh and David Brody have emphasized the conservative trade-union program of CIO leaders like John L. Lewis, Philip Murray and Sidney Hillman, all of whom consciously sought to channel working-class militancy into a stable and responsible unionism rooted in the AFL tradition. (2)

Both views shed light on the early industrial-union phenomenon, because like any social movement the CIO was not merely the product of the ideology of its leadership, but contained within its bounds a whole series of divergent social elements and political tendencies, some conscious about their political and economic goals, others inchoate and tentative.

After the great advances of 1937 the CIO did not immediately consolidate its power or bargaining relationships. The depression continued for almost four more years and the new unions were turned back at Ford and Little Steel. In this context trade unionists like Philip Murray could not fit their unions into the conservative mold they might have wished. Instead, mere survival put a premium upon local

union initiative and rank-and-file activity. In the UAW, for example, forceful action by Detroit- and Flint-area secondary leaders helped preserve and extend the gains the union had won in 1937. (3) And even in the tightly controlled and bureaucratically structured Steel Workers Organizing Committee, union leaders like Clinton Golden admitted that in this era a sort of guerrilla warfare was inevitable, even necessary, so long as a section of the industry resisted full recognition of the union. (4)

In the late 1930's the ultimate character of the new CIO was not foreordained. The industrial unions gave new power and clarity to working-class interests, yet at the same time the union apparatus and its bargaining relationship with individual business units served to rationalize social conflict and accommodate the government's demand for order and the corporate drive for profits and efficiency. The steady pressure of the business system reinforced a pattern of bureaucratic timidity within the unions while the lingering depression, the healthy activism of the rank and file, the momentum of 1936 and 1937 were powerful counter-tendencies. It was only with the coming of the war that the drive for production and social order on the home front would immensely strengthen the tendency toward hierarchical control and dependence on the government within the new industrial unions.

When the question of American intervention arose in 1940, most CIO unionists — like American liberals generally — came to the conclusion that a military defense had to be built against German fascism. Unsure of the stability of their newly formed organizations and unwilling to break their alliance with the Roosevelt administration, most in the CIO also acquiesced in the shift of government energy from a faltering New Deal to a business-dominated war-production effort.

Few unionists could see any alternative to Roosevelt's defense program. Although John L. Lewis realistically forecast the conservative economic and social consequences of total war, his attempt to project an isolationist defense against European fascism seemed both politically naive and militarily impractical. (5) Meanwhile the Communists moved from a policy of collective security to non-interven-

tionism after the Stalin-Hitler pact and the dismemberment of Poland, but once Germany invaded Russia in June 1941 they demanded outright American belligerency. Finally, the idea of an opposition to the war on either pacifist or revolutionary grounds seemed virtually non-existent — a situation in sharp contrast to the First World War, during which large sections of the working class had been influenced by such views.

The political and economic symbol of union cooperation with the war effort was an unconditional no-strike pledge, formally ratified by both CIO and AFL officials in a White House conference shortly after Pearl Harbor. The decision to sheath the strike weapon was made without any reciprocal agreement by the government on wartime wage, price or production policies. Instead the administration set up a tripartite War Labor Board composed of representatives of labor, management and the public. The board was empowered to arbitrate most union-management disputes, but its policies were to be guided almost entirely by decisions made in the executive branch alone. (6)

During most of the war CIO leaders were the foremost defenders of the no-strike pledge in the labor movement. Most of the industrial-union federation's leading officers — men like Sidney Hillman, James Carey, Walter Reuther, and Philip Murray — were political liberals and close allies and supporters of President Roosevelt. Because they held military success as the first essential step in a larger program of social reconstruction at home and abroad, they thought it both politically wise and socially progressive to accept wartime sacrifices and limit normal trade-union activity in the interests of a speedy victory. Since they had faith in the progressive character of the war, they thought it could not but have progressive consequences at home, regardless of the immediate demands the government made upon the union. (7) In this light many in the CIO, including but not limited to those influenced by the Communists, proposed that the unions be transformed into agencies of production for the duration. Lee Pressman, CIO general counsel, told the War Labor Board that the steelworkers' union wished to "forget their trade unionism as usual". Instead the USW was "anxious not to continue the presentation of

the same grievances that it has in the past...but (is) anxious to turn the entire machinery, to turn all the energy of the union and of the members toward increasing production." (8)

Government policy makers recognized that such an orientation imposed a dangerous burden on the industrial unions. The traditional web of loyalties which bound workers to their unions might unravel when labor ceased to exercise the strike weapon, grievances went unresolved, and wages were held in check by government fiat. Industrial-union leaders worried that the surge of brand-new war workers would prove extremely difficult to organize under these conditions. In the spring of 1942 a few important CIO locals had already begun to disintegrate, while serious dues-collection difficulties were encountered in steel, textiles and aircraft. (9)

In this potential crisis the government sought to strengthen the institutional power of the CIO's politically cooperative leadership. In prewar years CIO leaders had unsuccessfully demanded union-shop contracts as a guarantee that hostile employers would not seek to weaken the new unions during periods of slack employment. Now the government's WLB gave CIO unions a modified union shop — maintenance of membership — in order to assure membership stability and a steady dues flow during the difficult war years. The WLB's policy solved the chronic financial problems of many CIO unions, assured their steady wartime growth, and made cooperative union leaders somewhat "independent" of rank-and-file pressure. (10)

The no-strike pledge also seemed a necessary prerequisite to labor's bid to shape and help administer the wartime economy and lay plans for a liberal postwar order. Like the right-wing socialists and New Republic progressives of the First World War, CIO leaders hoped that the collectivist tendencies inherent in the mobilization of the society for total war might provide the opportunity to restructure industry on a basis in which labor could have a real say. In 1941 Roosevelt appointed Sidney Hillman co-director of the Office of Production Management, and for a time it looked as if the CIO vice-president might play the same influential role in America's domestic high command that the

British Labour Party's Ernest Bevin played in Churchill's war cabinet. (11) Meanwhile the CIO advocated a thorough reorganization of the production setup through the formation of a series of industry councils in which representatives of management, labor and government would jointly participate in the administration of each war industry. Walter Reuther's famous proposal to convert Detroit automobile factories to the production of 500 planes a day would have demanded a massive rationalization of the entire industry. In the process his automobile-industry council would have ignored corporate boundaries, markets and profits as it presided over the conscription of machine tools, working space and manpower where and when needed (12).

Labor's hopes for a progressive administration of the war economy were soon dashed. With Republicans Henry Stimson at the head of the War Department and Frank Knox at the head of the Navy, with dollar-a-year business executives flooding the new defense agencies, Roosevelt had already committed his administration to a mobilization effort designed to conciliate the business community and eschew new social initiatives. As FDR himself later put it, Dr. New Deal had been replaced by Dr. Win-the-War. CIO plans for a reorganization of production based on the industry-council model were flatly turned down where they were not ignored. And by the spring of 1942 Sidney Hillman was eased out of a top policy-making role and most defense agencies were staffed with only token labor representatives. (13) Of course these setbacks disappointed CIO officials, but such reverses did little to shake their faith in FDR personally or in their allegiance to the war effort. Instead the CIO characteristically blamed "defeatist" and "reactionary" elements in the Congress and the war-production agencies and reaffirmed its commitment to the no-strike pledge. (14)

An alternate perspective to the ambitious if thwarted plans of the CIO can be found among those unionists who took a more parochial view of the role a labor leader should play in the wartime mobilization. These unionists generally came out of an older AFL tradition and were less politically linked to the Roosevelt administration and rather less concerned with using the wartime experience as a platform



for social reform. John L. Lewis is the penultimate example of this type. He was uncommitted to Roosevelt's stewardship of the economy and unwilling to long subordinate immediate trade-union interests to the government's demand for continuous production and stable industrial relations. When in 1943 he concluded that the government had taken advantage of labor's no-strike pledge to impose a rigid wage formula on the unions, he did not hesitate to defy the WLB and lead the UMW in four nationwide strikes. (15) Ironically it was the very backward-looking and socially unimaginative business unionism of figures like Lewis which led some conservative unionists to defend bread-and-butter labor standards in a more consistent fashion than the liberal patriots of the industrial-union federation.

A 1942 contest between the UAW and the International Association of Machinists provides a graphic example of this wartime phenomenon. Under the prodding of Walter Reuther and Richard Frankenstein and at the request of the government, the UAW agreed to relinquish certain types of overtime pay in the interests of a general "Victory Through Equality of Sacrifice" program. UAW organizers thought this plan would help organize new war workers through its patriotic appeal. (16) For example they told Southern California aircraft workers: "The best way (you) can speed up war production, and contribute even more to the war effort, is to join the CIO, which has made this business of winning the war its main objective." (17)

In contrast the machinists' union emphasized wages and hours and the maintenance of overtime pay standards. The IAM attacked the UAW: "Can the CIO's masterminds tell you why they know what's good for the worker better than he knows himself?...the CIO sacrifices workers' pay, workers' overtime as the CIO's contribution to the war effort. Big of them, huh?" (18) In a series of 1942 NLRB elections the IAM decisively defeated the UAW on this issue. UAW and CIO leaders who had pitched their election campaigns on an exclusively patriotic level were stunned. In defeat they quickly appealed to the WLB and the Administration, not to restore overtime pay, but to force the IAM and the rest of the AFL to give it up as well. This FDR soon did by issuing a special executive order on the problem. (19)

This incident points to an important aspect of working-class consciousness during the war. Most workers were patriotic and backed the war effort, but they resisted the consequences of the wartime regimentation and mobilization, especially if it entailed the sacrifice of pre-war conquests their unions had made in the late 30's. Many war workers retained an aggressive distrust of big business and their own plant management, even in the first intensely patriotic months of the war. Many thought their employers would try to use the wartime emergency as an occasion to weaken their unions and roll back labor standards. (20) In short they did not believe, or what is more important act as if, the war had suspended class conflict.

In any work situation conflicts inevitably arise between workers and their supervisors over working conditions, individual wage rates, promotions and transfers. In prewar years the strike weapon often backstopped local grievance procedures and provided an incentive for management to resolve grievances at the lowest possible level. But with the adoption of the no-strike pledge this incentive evaporated and grievances left unresolved were dumped into the lap of a distant and cumbersome War Labor Board. Local unions found themselves "plagued by a malady of unsettled grievances" which undermined the solidarity and effectiveness of the union. (21) The WAGE EARNER, organ of the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, summed up the local union's dilemma:

Workers may remain loyal to their unions even when no wage increases can be obtained.... But if the union loses its capacity to represent its members effectively when they get into trouble with the management, it has lost its primary reason for being. (22)

Many local leaders — the stewards, committeemen and officers who represented the backbone of an industrial union — now faced an excruciating dilemma. They could enforce CIO national policy, defend the no-strike pledge, and watch the power of their locals disintegrate as management prerogatives grew and rank-and-file respect and loyalty

for the union declined. In the process they might easily find themselves turned out of office by a sullen membership.

Or they could ignore and defy international policy and revert to what they called "prewar" methods: the slow-down, the work to rule, the wildcat strike, to resolve pressing shop-floor grievances. The tension inherent in this decision is captured in the minutes of a meeting between a UAW regional director and a Cleveland local president who had just led his union on a wildcat strike in defense of two members fired by the company.

UAW Regional Director Paul Miley: ... I instructed you to get the plant back in operation.... Do you understand that the production of some four or five hundred aircraft engines has been lost already... doesn't (that) affect your judgment in this case at all?

Local 91 President Lawrence Wilkey: I wouldn't say, Paul, that it doesn't affect my judgment, but I wasn't elected by those people to win the war. I was elected to lead those people and to represent them. I have tried my best to abide by the Constitution (of the UAW) but at this time my conscience will not let me because of my duty to those people. (23)

By the middle years of the war a growing list of local union leaders began to follow Lawrence Wilkey's example. These unauthorized strikes resembled the work stoppages which flared in the auto and rubber industries before the organization of the national CIO unions: uncoordinated except on the department or plantwide level, short in duration, led by a shifting and semi-spontaneous leadership. The strikes bypassed and ignored the international's formal apparatus for the resolution of grievances because these procedures had proven themselves ineffective, in fact an obstacle, to the genuine defense of what many union activists considered an elementary trade-union presence in their shops and factories. (24)

Beginning in the spring of 1943, and coinciding with the

nationwide coal strikes launched by John L. Lewis, a wave of wildcat strikes swept through Detroit, Akron, and the East Coast shipyards. The commissioner of labor statistics called the strike wave a "fundamental swell of industrial unrest". (25) In unionized industries like auto, steel, and rubber, the level of wildcats rose steadily until the end of the war. (26)



Faced with this challenge to industrial order and internal union discipline, top CIO officials renewed their commitment to the no-strike pledge. In this they were backed and prodded by the government, which now demanded "union responsibility". The WLB threatened to withdraw or deny maintenance of membership and the dues checkoff to any union whose leadership led or condoned wartime work stoppages. In 1943, for example, the WLB denied Chrysler locals of the UAW maintenance of membership because the board felt local leaders had been insufficiently vigorous in their opposition to recent strikes. (27) Later Richard Leonard, who headed the UAW's Ford Department, reported to the union executive board that unless the union took a "constructive position" the labor board would deal harshly with the UAW in forthcoming Ford and Briggs decisions. (28)

Therefore, in early 1944, the UAW executive board decided to crack down hard on wildcat strikes. The union announced that henceforth wildcat strikers could no longer use local union grievance procedures to appeal company discipline. Local leaders who continued to defend these strikers would be suspended from office and their locals placed under an international administratorship. (29) "The kid-glove tactics of yesterday have been discarded" reported FORD FACTS, organ of the UAW's giant local at the Rouge. (30) During the remaining 19 months of the war hundreds of UAW members were fired or otherwise disciplined by the auto companies while their national officers stood aside. Several locals were taken over by the international and their leaders suspended from office. (31) Much the same process was taking place in the rubber, steel and shipbuilding internationals as well. (32) Thus the WLB's "union responsibility" doctrine encouraged union officials to discipline rank-and-file militants and reshape their unions in a more conservative pattern.

Top leaders of the CIO were not unaware of the internal problems created by the no-strike pledge, and they felt a certain anguish in their new role as government-backed disciplinarians of their rank and file. Yet they felt they had little choice: "We may have to take it on the chin here and there for a time" admitted R. J. Thomas, president of the UAW, but he thought only a policy of self-restraint could avoid a union-smashing assault from the right. (33) Since these unionists feared to mobilize the economic and social power of their own membership to stem the conservative drift in wartime domestic politics, they relied ever more heavily upon FDR and his administration as a bulwark against the right. Hence in 1943 the CIO stood as the staunchest defender of the WLB in its fight with John L. Lewis because most industrial-union officials feared, with good reason, that if Lewis won a stunning victory over the government board, then the strike weapon would become legitimate once again and rank-and-file agitation for unionwide work stoppages would increase. (34) Already in May 1943 the national mine strikes during that month had touched off massive wildcats in Detroit and Akron.

At the same time the CIO also linked itself more closely

to the national Democratic Party through the formation, in July 1943, of the CIO Political Action Committee. The PAC was organized by top CIO officials to meet a dual threat. Its most publicized function was to counter the conservative drift in domestic politics symbolized by and in part culminating in the passage of the Smith-Connolly Act over FDR's veto in June 1943. But an equally important purpose of the committee was to deflect and defeat a growing internal union demand for some form of independent political action in the 1944 elections. In Michigan a number of important UAW secondary leaders, led by Emil Mazey and Paul Silver, had revived the moribund state Labor Non-Partisan League and begun a remarkably successful agitation in favor of a CIO-based labor party. During the spring of 1943 they linked their break with Roosevelt and the Democratic Party to an attack upon the no-strike pledge and strong support of the mine strikers. (35) At an important Michigan CIO convention in late June the radical Mazey forces joined with a more moderate group led by Victor Reuther and Gus Scholle to pass, over strong Communist and conservative opposition, a resolution endorsing a labor-based third party in the state. (36)

Meanwhile, on the East Coast, a section of the old social-democratic union leadership in retail trade and the garment and textile industries came to advocate more aggressive electoral tactics. As the ILGWU paper JUSTICE editorialized, "The present Congress is the best argument for independent political action the country has had in years." (37) Led by David Dubinsky, these New York social democrats hoped to link up with the Michigan radicals and spread their American Labor Party to other industrial states. While neither Dubinsky nor the Reuther-Scholle group favored outright opposition to Roosevelt on the national level, they did support direct labor-party challenges to state and local Democratic machines, thereby undercutting FDR's conservative base and forcing him (they hoped) to the left. (38)

"When the move to create an ultraliberal political party in the name of the workingman began to gather steam," recalled then USW secretary-treasurer David J. McDonald in his autobiography, "Murray and Hillman decided that they



*Labor Day parade in 1944.*

should counter it with a specific, labor-oriented political-action organization that could function within the two-party system.” (39) Under Hillman’s leadership the new PAC attacked the labor-party idea on the ground that it would “divide progressive forces”. Although the Political Action Committee was able to defeat some conservative Democrats in the 1944 primaries, the national PAC encouraged its state units not to challenge local Democratic parties, but to reach an accommodation with them in order to “weld the unity of all forces who support the Commander-in-Chief behind a single progressive win-the-war candidate for each office.” (40)

Where labor sentiment for an independent political voice remained strong and threatened to disrupt an alliance with the Democrats, Hillman mobilized PAC forces to defeat it. In New York Hillman linked his once anti-Communist Amalgamated Clothing Workers with the Communist unions of the city to win control of the ALP from the Dubinsky social democrats and make the state labor party an uncritical adjunct of the Democratic Party there. (41) In Michigan, where a viable Democratic Party hardly existed, the PAC successfully fought efforts by some UAW radicals to put the state Political Action Committee on record as supporting only those Democratic candidates pledged to a guaranteed annual income and other well-publicized CIO bargaining demands. (42)

Part of the reason for the wartime political timidity of the PAC was that in looking forward to the immediate postwar months CIO leaders like Philip Murray foresaw a 1920-style political reaction combined with a major postwar recession. In this context Murray hoped to avoid at almost any cost a potentially disastrous postwar strike wave after the fall of Japan. Murray's CIO reconversion strategy forecast a new labor board which would impose a government-backed accommodation with industry along with a somewhat more liberal wage-price formula. (43) As we shall see the CIO's neat corporatist blueprint for the postwar future ran into major opposition from the industrial-union rank and file, whose insistent demand for a restoration of the strike weapon forced a section of the CIO leadership to break with Murray's cautious program.

Before turning to this new situation, one must take into account another ideological tendency, the Communists and their close followers, and examine their relationship to the defense of the no-strike pledge. Although their organizational influence was extensive, the main impact of the Communists stemmed less from the offices they held than from the ideology they advanced. They defended the no-strike pledge with passion and prided themselves on their support of Philip Murray and the official CIO line. Yet the Communist policy only coincidentally meshed with that of other CIO leaders. Murray and Thomas thought the best way to defend their unions was through a policy of close alliance with FDR and temporary appeasement of the resurgent right. Communist spokesmen urged the CIO to agree to all concessions demanded by the government, not so much as a tactical retreat, but as a progressive step in and of itself, one which mirrored on the home front the "Big Three Unity" forged by Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin at the Teheran conference. (44)

The persistent theme of the Communists during the war was the need for the unity of all "progressive win-the-war forces". Yet the success of this new popular front would be possible only on a basis agreeable to conservative elements in the government and the military. (45) Hence those in the CIO high command who were influenced by this ideology — men like Harry Bridges and Joseph Curran — initially sup-



ported the Army and Navy call for compulsory National Service Legislation even when Philip Murray opposed it as destructive of trade-union principles. (46) And the New York and Detroit CIO councils, in which Communists held important posts, refused to help the CIO-authorized strikes of Montgomery Ward's unionized employees even after Ward's chairman Sewell Avery defied a WLB directive favorable to the retail clerks' union. (47)

Ultra-conservative though it seemed to many, the appeal of this ideology during the war should not be underestimated. By giving the conflict an uncritically progressive quality, the Communists provided a rationale for those in the union movement who sought to reconcile the waning power of domestic labor-liberalism with their own radical and anti-capitalist sensibilities. Thus otherwise reactionary programs, like national service legislation, imposition of undemocratic forms of internal union discipline, or alliance with anti-labor big-city bosses, were justified as strengthening the "win-the-war" forces in the world battle against fascism. The ultimate commitment of domestic communist leaders, therefore, was less to the defense of the American working class in its day-to-day struggles than to the political/military success of the Russian regime and the new bureaucratic social system it represented.

Despite continued defense of the no-strike pledge by a coalition of Communist and non-Communist CIO leaders, pressure from below began to crack the strike prohibition in 1944 and 1945. In retail trade and in textiles, where the CIO had only secured a shaky foothold, low wages and employer violation of basic labor rights literally forced union leaders to authorize a series of strikes to prevent the imminent disintegration of their organizations. (48) In the United Rubber Workers the big four Akron locals virtually seceded from the international as they struck repeatedly in the last year of the war. (49) Debate on the no-strike pledge flared briefly in the Steelworkers and in the UE as well. (50)

But the movement against the pledge reached its climax in the million-and-a-quarter-strong auto union, where the growth of rank-and-file sentiment had an important influence on the postwar decision to strike GM and on Walter

Reuther's rise to the UAW presidency. Wildcat strikes led by UAW members were soon echoed by outright demands for repeal of the no-strike pledge itself. At the 1943 Michigan CIO convention, a resolution easily carried which called on the national CIO to rescind the pledge unless substantial changes were soon made in WLB wage policy. As we have seen, the state CIO, the most important of its kind in the industrial-union federation, also went on record in defense of the UMW strikes and in favor of some form of independent political action by the wartime labor movement. (51) Support for these initiatives was led by a group of UAW secondary leaders who became convinced that abolition of the no-strike pledge was necessary to remobilize labor's own forces both in their factories and in the larger political arena.

Some of these individuals were socialists, others were influenced by the Trotskyists, some were members of the Anti-Marxist Association of Catholic Trade Unionists. But most who came to oppose the pledge did not do so out of a conscious commitment to radical politics, but rather because their day-to-day experience convinced them of the destructive impact it was having on their locals and their international. (52) They were especially alarmed when the UAW officers used "strikebreaking" tactics to crack down on wildcat strikes. As Chicago's Buick Local Six put it, "The gap between the rank and file and their elected leaders will grow so wide that our whole structure will collapse. Vote against the no-strike pledge and save your union." (53)

This movement soon had an important impact on the internal politics of the auto union itself. Until 1944 all of the top leaders of the UAW were firm supporters of the pledge, but Walter Reuther favored a somewhat more vigorous opposition to other restrictions and demands the government made upon the union. Therefore Reuther opposed government-sponsored incentive-pay schemes in UAW-organized factories and sharply criticized the War Labor Board and other federal agencies. (54) Despite Reuther's growing popularity on these issues, he did not associate himself with the movement for outright repeal of the pledge, and in 1944 he backed the efforts of the UAW executive board to discipline wildcat strikers. (55)

This proved a near fatal mistake. Since most of the opposition to the pledge came from those who normally supported the UAW vice-president, Reuther began to lose his internal union strength as the movement against the pledge picked up steam. At the 1944 UAW convention Reuther tried to straddle the issue with an ungainly compromise, keeping the no-strike pledge in some factories, ending it in others. The idea pleased no one. Outright opponents of the no-strike pledge, now organized into an independent Rank and File Caucus, demanded and won a unionwide referendum on the issue and fielded candidates for union office against both Reuther and his factional rival, Richard Frankenstein. Reuther's caucus strength now began to disintegrate, and for the first time he lost a convention vote to Frankenstein. Reuther retained his union vice-presidency only by winning the second-ballot contest against another less-prominent opponent. (56)

Reuther's close call at the 1944 UAW convention proved a turning point in his wartime career. Thereafter Reuther sought an accommodation with the militant and rebellious sentiment growing in the ranks, if only to retain his own power in the UAW. In early 1945 Reuther urged that the CIO withdraw from the WLB until that government agency was reorganized and adopted a more liberal wage policy. (57) A couple of months later he reversed his position on enforcement of the pledge and insisted that the UAW executive board not impose the usual disciplinary measures against the two Detroit locals then on strike. (58) With the



*UAW members marching from Detroit to Windsor, Ontario to show their support for the Ford of Canada strikers.*

fall of Germany those who had long fought for an end to the pledge now insisted upon an immediate industry-wide strike vote to back CIO demands for an end to government wage ceilings. Alone among prominent members of the UAW leadership, Reuther backed this proposal. (59) By shifting to the left, Reuther was rapidly winning back the support he had lost the year before.

With the end of the war against Japan, the rash of unauthorized strikes in the UAW, which reached epidemic and uncontrollable proportions, threatened to disrupt Philip Murray's plan to forge a new postwar wage-price formula in return for a promise of renewed labor peace and cooperation. Therefore R. J. Thomas and UAW Secretary-Treasurer George Addes opposed any new initiatives on the part of the auto workers until Murray and the national CIO had had time to work out a comprehensive program at a government-sponsored labor-management conference in November 1945. (60)

Of course the problem was that in the absence of a patriotic wartime ideology order in the UAW could not be restored by appeals to follow national CIO policy. R. J. Thomas declared the situation "chaotic" as local after local struck to reassert its power in the shops. (61) In this crisis Reuther came forward with his proposal for an early company-wide strike against General Motors, a proposal which provides a classic example of the characterization C. Wright Mills once gave to the labor leader as a "manager of discontent". (62)

Reuther's GM strike plan would harness the restlessness of the auto workers, restore legitimacy to top union authority, and advance his own fortunes in the internal union scramble for office. The GM strike demand — for a 30% wage boost with an increase in the price of cars — was but a militant restatement of then current, but soon to be abandoned, CIO postwar wage policy. Yet the idea excited union ranks because it was demanded directly of the corporation and backed by union strike power, rather than offered up to a government agency for tripartite negotiation. (63) At the same time the strike had its conservative side as well. It offered a new rationale for ending wildcat strikes at GM competitors, which were now to be kept at full production

in keeping with the "one at a time" strike strategy. In fact "company security" clauses were soon negotiated with Ford and Chrysler which gave plant management their broad powers to discipline those who pulled unauthorized strikes. (64)

Reuther's plan for and conduct of the GM strike climaxed his accommodation to the radical forces within his union which the wildcat-strike movement and campaign against the no-strike pledge had set in motion. Reuther won the UAW presidency in 1946 by winning the wartime militants back into his caucus. (65)

Ironically, Reuther's aggressive GM strike policy indirectly aided the more timid leaders of other CIO unions. Without the auto strike Philip Murray might have been able for a time to reach the bureaucratic accommodation with government and industry for which he had long planned. But the GM strike made such an immediate postwar agreement difficult and helped precipitate the general 1946 strike wave—the largest since 1919. (66) In turn this massive work stoppage restored to conservative or Communist leaders of the CIO a good deal of the prestige and publicity which they had lost during the era of wartime cooperation with the government and enforcement of the no-strike pledge.

In conclusion, one can make three observations about the experience of workers and their unions during the war. The first is that despite the maintenance of a patriotic consensus unparalleled in American history, many war workers still felt use of the strike weapon vital to the defense of those standards by which they measured their dignity and power in the shops. The wildcat strikes themselves were not designed to slow overall war production, but they were nevertheless explosive social phenomena because they challenged the wartime industrial-relations "system" and cut across the formal ideology of labor-management cooperation and common purpose. In the act of striking war workers put their evaluation on the conduct of the home front. They measured concrete shop-floor reality against official propaganda and found the latter inadequate. Hence the implicit threat these strikes posed and the determined opposition they evoked from the government and union leaders.

A second point follows the first. The call for political

conformity in the new industrial unions had been present from the founding of the CIO in the mid-30's. But the campaign to really enforce internal political discipline began not with the anti-Communist purges of the early cold war, but under the aegis of the wartime mobilization. The political and institutional requirements of the War Labor Board were no less exacting than those of the Taft-Hartley Act five years later. In this context the cold-war crackdown on Communists in the unions represented not so much a break with a wartime popular front as a continuation of an era during which the society has been organized and regimented in the interests of a military-minded foreign policy. An important domestic requirement of this war economy has been a policy of essential cooperation from the labor movement. During the war the Communists defended this drive for political conformity; in 1948 and 1949 they were its victims.

Finally the experience of American industrial unions during World War II stands as an important stage in the transition of the new unions from the aggressive and turbulent 1930's to the relative quiescence of the postwar years. The wartime routinization and expansion of collective bargaining was in one sense a step forward for the unions, but it took place under circumstances which put a premium upon internal union discipline and a penalty upon self-activity and militancy. Authority in the large industrial unions moved continually upward under these conditions as labor officials looked to Washington to set the guidelines for war and post-war economic and political policy.

#### FOOTNOTES

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9. Philip Murray to Wayne Coy, March 6, 1942, Box 18, Coy papers, FDR Library, Hyde Park; United Steelworkers PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIRST CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION, May 1942, pp. 41, 48, 81; see also Walker-Turner Company, 1 WAR LABOR REPORTS (April 10, 1942), p. 108-109; Marshall Field and Co., 1 WAR LABOR REPORTS (February 25, 1942), pp. 47-53; Transcript, National War Labor Board, March 26, 1942.

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24. For contrasting descriptions of the wartime wildcat strike phenomenon, see Rosa Lee Swafford, WARTIME RECORD OF STRIKES AND LOCKOUTS, 1940-1945, 79th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Document No. 136 (Washington, 1946), pp. 1-37, passim; Jerome F. Scott and George C. Homans, "Reflections on Wildcat Strikes", AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW XII (June 1947), pp. 278-287; and Lichtenstein, "Industrial Unionism Under the No-Strike Pledge", pp. 326-367, 596-641.

25. Memorandum, Isidor Lubin to Harry Hopkins, May 27, 1943, in President's Personal File, Box 145, Roosevelt papers.

26. Swafford, WARTIME RECORD, pp. 3-4.

27. Chrysler Corporation, 10 WAR LABOR BOARD REPORTS (August 27, 1943), pp. 553-555; War Labor Board Hearing Transcript, July 28, 1943, pp. 25-29.

28. UAW Executive Board Minutes, February 7-16, 1944, pp. 83-84, Box 3, Thomas papers, ALHWSU.

29. UNITED AUTO WORKER, Mzrch 1, 1944.

30. FORD FACTS, April 1, 1944. The local's leadership made this remark after the UAW executive board had used its new powers to allow Ford management to discipline 126 unionists who had participated in a recent wildcat strike at the Rouge.

31. DETROIT FREE PRESS, May 22, 25, 27, 1944; LABOR ACTION, June 5, August 28, 1944, UAW Executive Board Minutes, August 1, 1944, Box 5, UAW Executive Board Collection, ALHWSU.

32. In the United Rubber Workers the WLB and the Army worked closely with the URW national leadership to try to break the wildcat strike tradition in the "Big Four" Akron locals. See PROCEEDINGS, EIGHTH CONVENTION, UNITED RUBBER WORKERS OF AMERICA, Toronto, September 20-24, 1943, p. 58; Harold S. Roberts, THE RUBBER WORKERS (New York, 1944), pp. 362-364; Big Four Rubber Companies, 8 WAR LABOR BOARD REPORTS (May 21, 1943), pp. 594-598; US Rubber Company, 21 WAR LABOR BOARD REPORTS (January 16, 1945), pp. 182-183; UNITED RUBBER WORKER, February, March 1944, July 1945.

In the United Steelworkers the Pittsburgh bureaucracy already held more institutional power than their counterparts in Detroit or Akron, but wildcat strikes were still a problem which required stepped-up measures of control from the national union leadership. See Memorandum, Lee Pressman to Van Bittner, January 18, 1943, Entry 406, RG 202, NA; Pressman to Murray, June 21, 1944; Murray to William H. Davis (chairman WLB), September 28, 1943; Clinton Golden to Daniel P. Sheehan, Staff Representative, October 18, 1944; David J. McDonald to Murray, May 28, 1943; and "Work Stoppages and Slowdowns", Report of Policy Committee Meeting, February 11, 1944, all in Box A4-6, Murray papers, Catholic University.

For brief accounts of WLB discipline in the International Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America see Victor H. Johnson, "Case History of a Shipbuilding 'Wildcat'", NATION, January 15, 1944; New England Shipbuilding Corporation file, Case No. 25-175-D, Entry 53, RG 202, NA.

33. UNITED AUTO WORKER, June 1, 1944; for similar comments by Philip Murray see Proceedings...USW, May 9-13, 1944, p. 135.

34. Of course Lewis stood as an alternative leadership to the existing CIO hierarchy and posed for a time as a threat to internal CIO stability. See Malcolm Ross and Richard Deverall to Harold Ickes, "CIO-AFL-RR Strategy on Wage and Price Policy and Its Relation to the John L. Lewis Situation", May 11, 1943, Vol. 2, p. 270, Deverall notebooks, Catholic University: CIO NEWS, May 24, 1943.

35. Deverall to Clarence Glick, "A Summary: The Michigan CIO Council Convention, Detroit, Michigan, 28 June to 3 July", July 7, 1943, Vol. 1, p. 483, Deverall notebooks.

36. PROCEEDINGS 1943 MICHIGAN CIO CONVENTION, pp. 169-214.

37. JUSTICE, July 1, 1943.

38. Deverall to Glick, June 24, 1943, Vol. 2, p. 53; NEW YORK TIMES, May 23, 24, 1943; UNITED AUTO WORKER (Local 174 Edition), July 1, 1943. Dubinsky demonstrated the ALP's newfound independence from the Democrats when in 1942 his party ran a gubernatorial candidate opposed to a Roosevelt-backed Democrat for the first time. See Robert C. Carter, "Pressure from the Left: The American Labor Party, 1936-1954" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Syracuse, 1965), p. 158.

39. David J. McDonald, UNION MAN (New York, 1969), p. 169. AERO NOTES, organ of UAW Local 365 on Long Island, commented upon the formation of the PAC from the point of view of those who favored a third party: "One is startled by the CIO Executive Board attempting to knock off in its infancy a regenerative spontaneous movement for labor action instituted by the rank and file. Murray and Hillman would rather substitute an impotent program for political action than have a genuine independent mass movement because they fear that they will be unable to control the direction of this movement." AERO NOTES, October 6, 1943.

40. Joseph Gaer, THE FIRST ROUND, THE STORY OF THE CIO-PAC (New York, 1944), p. 60. A generally sympathetic account of the PAC, which nevertheless reaches some of the same conclusions put forward here, is found in James C. Foster's new book THE UNION POLITIC, THE CIO POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE (Columbia, Mo., 1975), pp. 3-48, passim.

41. Josephson, SIDNEY HILLMAN, pp. 600-602; LABOR ACTION, February 14, 1944. In Minnesota much the same process took place when PAC officials forced merger of the radical Farmer-Labor Party there with the Hubert Humphrey-led Democrats. Foster, UNION POLITIC, pp. 34, 41.

42. LABOR ACTION, May 8, 1944.

43. In March 1945 Murray signed a "Labor-Management Charter" with William Green of the AFL and Eric Johnson of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The charter was important not for what it said, which consisted of a list of often irreconcilable platitudes hailing the virtues of unfettered free enterprise and the rights of labor, but as an indication by union leaders that they hoped to cooperate with the liberal wing

of American capitalism in stabilizing postwar labor relations roughly upon the basis established during the war. In August 1945, Green, Murray and Johnson reached an interim agreement granting labor an immediate 10% wage increase in return for a continued no-strike pledge and a new government labor board. Murray hoped a more substantial wage-price formula could be worked out at the President's Labor-Management Conference in November. CHESTER WRIGHT'S LABOR LETTER, March 31, July 21, 1945; PM, March 29, 1945; see also Barton Bernstein, "The Truman Administration and Its Reconversion Wage Policy", LABOR HISTORY VI (Fall 1965), pp. 214-231.

44. See for example the remarks of Nat Ganley, CP leader in the UAW, in PROCEEDINGS OF THE 1943 MICHIGAN CIO COUNCIL 1943, p. 68; and Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, THE AMERICAN COMMUNIST PARTY, A CRITICAL HISTORY (New York, 1957), p. 427.

45. The leadership of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers, strongly influenced by the Communists, advanced this point of view in their official "Officer's Report to the Convention". Admitting that Roosevelt had not done all the labor movement might have wished, the UE nevertheless declared the "more imminent the destruction of Fascism the more daring will be the moves by anti-democratic forces to create suspicion against the administration." The UE leadership called for criminal indictments against those "undermining... Administration win-the-war policies." These elements included not only the right-wing Republican Press, but also John L. Lewis and others who favored wartime strikes. PROCEEDINGS 1943 UE CONVENTION, pp. 63-65, 81.

46. Koistinen, "Hammer and Sword", pp. 483-485.

47. LABOR ACTION, January 1, 8, 1945; WAGE EARNER, February 2, 1945; DAILY WORKER, December 24, 1944; see also Aaron Levenson, LABOR TODAY AND TOMORROW (New York, 1945), pp. 160-169.

48. PM, February 16, 21, 1945; TEXTILE LABOR, March 1945; LABOR ACTION, March 26, 1945.

49. UNITED RUBBER WORKER, May, June, July 1945; NEW YORK TIMES, July 6, 13, 1945. LABOR ACTION, July 2, 9, 16, 1945.

50. PROCEEDINGS 1944 USW CONVENTION, pp. 130-137; PROCEEDINGS 1944 UE CONVENTION, pp. 65-77.

51. PROCEEDINGS 1943 MICHIGAN CIO COUNCIL, pp. 128-140 *passim*.

52. Irving Howe and B. J. Widick, THE UAW AND WALTER REUTHER (New York, 1949), pp. 120-125; PROCEEDINGS 1944 UAW CONVENTION, pp. 147-225, 447-464.

53. THE HI-FLYER (UAW Local 6), November 1944.

54. The incentive-pay issue illustrates the extent to which Reuther was willing to disagree with his factional rivals in the UAW, but still not go so far as his more militant supporters would have wished. In the early spring of 1943 the government was confronted with John L. Lewis' drive to smash the WLB's "Little Steel formula" wage guidelines. Worried that this assault might pick up support in other CIO unions, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9328, which reaffirmed the rigid WLB

wage rules but opened the way to pay increases through the implementation of incentive wage schemes. Because most CIO leaders were reluctant to join Lewis in a direct confrontation with the administration on the wage issue, they seized upon the incentive-pay idea as a way of circumventing the onerous Little Steel formula. Richard Frankenstein hoped incentive pay could rescue the floundering UAW aircraft drive, of which he was director.

The problem was that incentive pay, even if it would raise war-worker pay, represented a step backward from the principle of straight hourly wages, and union-conscious workers in Michigan overwhelmingly rejected the scheme in May and June 1943. Reuther helped lead the fight against incentive pay, and directed union fire toward the Little Steel formula and the administration itself, but he did not come out in support of the UMW mine strikes which had triggered the new surge of rank-and-file militancy in the union. Nevertheless the defeat of incentive pay in the UAW, coupled with Lewis' victory over the WLB in November 1943, forced the national CIO to at long last demand an upward revision of the WLB wage guidelines. For more on this issue see Lichtenstein, "Industrial Unionism Under the No-Strike Pledge", pp. 392-429.

55. UAW Executive Board Minutes, August 1, 1944, Box 5, UAW Executive Board Collection, ALHWSU.

56. PROCEEDINGS 1944 UAW CONVENTION, pp. 147-225, 468-469, passim. Many left-wing Reutherites supported the Rank and File Caucus program and criticized the GM Director's equivocation on the no-strike pledge issue. Jack Conway Oral History, pp. 14-16, ALHWSU.

57. UAW Executive Board Minutes, January 26, 1945, Box 23, Adde papers, ALHWSU.

58. UAW Executive Board Minutes, March 5-8, 1945, Box 23, Adde papers.

59. WAGE EARNER, June 22, 1945.

60. UAW Executive Board Minutes, September 10-18, 1945, p. 46, Box 4, Thomas papers, ALHWSU; UNITED AUTO WORKER, September 1, 1945.

61. UAW Executive Board Minutes, September 10-18, 1945, p. 46.

62. IBID., pp. 47-48; the Mills quote is from his NEW MEN OF POWER (New York, 1948), p. 9.

63. For accounts of the strike see Howe and Widick, UAW AND WALTER REUTHER, pp. 126-148; Barton Bernstein, "Walter Reuther and the General Motors Strike of 1945-46", MICHIGAN HISTORY XLIX (September 1965), pp. 260-277; Victor Reuther's critical comments on Murray's reconversion wage strategy are found in V. Reuther, "Look Forward Labor", COMMON SENSE (December 1945), p. 8.

64. WAGE EARNER, December 7, 1945; NEW YORK TIMES, January 27, 1946; for left-wing criticism of these company security clauses see LABOR ACTION, December 17, 24, 1945, and THE MILITANT, January 12, March 23, 1946.

65. This statement is based upon an analysis and inspection of the voting lists in the 1944 and 1946 UAW conventions. Of the 70 largest locals in the union, about three-quarters of those who had voted against the no-strike pledge in 1944 cast most of their ballots in favor of Reuther's presidential bid in 1946. Conversely, about three-quarters of those locals which had backed the no-strike pledge in 1944 voted for Thomas in 1946.

66. The unorthodox character of the GM strike demands alarmed leaders of the steel industry who insisted that a wage settlement with the USW allow ample room for an increase in the price of steel. By late January 1946 they actually welcomed a steel strike as a means of putting pressure on the Office of Price Administration to raise its price ceilings. Bernstein, "The Truman Administration and the Steel Strike of 1946", JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY LII (March 1966), pp. 791-803.

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# Workers' Power

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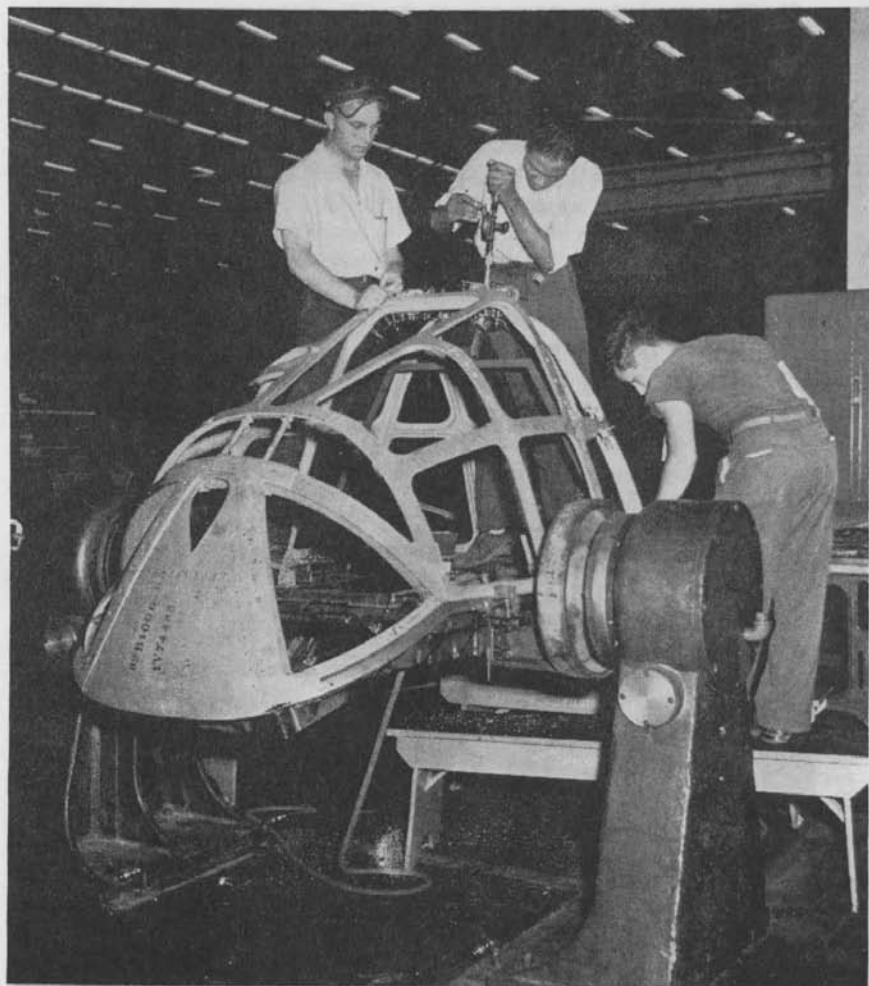
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*Auto workers assemble a nose section for a B-24 bomber at Willow Run.*

## **Wildcat!**

### **The Wartime Strike Wave in Auto**

*Ed Jennings*

Liberal historians rarely show much understanding of the tension between the leadership and the rank and file of the labor movement. For these historians, the leadership becomes virtually synonymous with the labor movement. The Reuthers, the Dubinskys, and the Lewises emerge as the source of labor's greatest successes, while the rank and file becomes little more than a "mass" responding to its leaders. This approach to labor history leaves more questions than it answers. It does little to explain, for example, the thousands of workers who created local industrial unions before John L. Lewis ever thought of the Committee of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Still less does it explain the willingness of many workers to defy their employers and their union leaders by engaging in wildcat strikes. (1)

This inability to distinguish between the leadership and the rank and file is the cause of the inadequate historiography of the labor movement during the Second World War.

Liberal historians have seen only the emotional and patriotic speeches of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and CIO leaders, the examples of wartime labor-management cooperation and the affirmations and reaffirmations of the no-strike pledge. Labor's role during the war, according to one historian, was "one of energetic cooperation with the government, with industry and with itself." (2)

If such a description were accurate, corporations and unions alike would look back on these years as a "golden era" of labor relations. That they do not immediately raises questions about the accuracy of this description. In 1945, the Ford Motor Company concluded that the peaceful relations which it expected from its 1941 contract with the United Automobile Workers (UAW) "have not materialized." (3) A year earlier R. J. Thomas, wartime president of the UAW, complained that "the rank and file is getting out of hand" and also that "there have been too many wildcat strikes." (4)

The reality was far different from what the liberal description would warrant. In spite of the accommodationist union leadership, the no-strike pledge, and governmental threats, more strikes occurred in 1944 than in 1937, the year of the great CIO victories in the automobile and steel industries. (5) In the same year and in spite of the same factors, a majority of automobile workers participated in wildcat strikes. (6) Conflict, as well as cooperation, characterized the wartime labor movement.

Correcting the liberal description does not mean going to the opposite extreme. The war years were not ones of industrial chaos or impending revolution. The vast majority of workers did not strike, and only a minority actively opposed the union. Certainly, American workers did not oppose the war; their overwhelming support for it came out of their hatred of Hitler and their fear of fascism.

This article will concentrate on the wartime experience of the automobile industry and its union, the United Automobile Workers (UAW-CIO). Neither the union nor the industry was typical of the wartime labor movement. No other industry saw a majority of its workers participate in wildcat strikes, and no other union experienced such a large and persistent rank-and-file revolt. But, if neither was typ-



ical, both were extremely important. Before the war, one in every seven employed persons in the U.S. was dependent, directly or indirectly, on the production of automobiles. (7) The converted auto industry became the heart of the nation's wartime military production.

When the war began, the UAW was the world's largest union. Recognition from the auto makers had come only after years of struggle, and to many workers, the UAW represented the best elements of working-class militancy. Within the labor movement, and especially within the CIO, its influence was great. This combination of the nation's largest and most important wartime industry and the nation's largest and possibly most militant union was potentially explosive.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor dramatically transformed the automobile industry; the automaker's resistance to conversion vanished overnight. Automobile assembly ended immediately and the production of planes, guns, tanks, and military equipment began soon after. Nineteen forty-two became known as "the year of the great conversion." (8)

Unemployment proved to be the first effect of conversion. The termination of auto production and the highly skilled nature of the retooling process allowed the companies to lay off thousands of workers. At General Motors alone, employment dropped from 197,000 in December, 1941 to 148,000 in March, 1942. (9) Signs of discontent appeared among the workers. According to one reporter: "Detroit workers are sore and resentful . . . Feelings are more bitter than they have been at any time since the sit-down strikes." (10) Only the knowledge that the layoffs were temporary kept the workers under control. Employment began to increase during the summer of 1942 and by the end of the year, surpassed pre-war levels. It continued to rise until November, 1943, when the total reached 824,000, 70 percent higher than the 1941 average. (11)

Detroit became a boom town overnight as thousands of workers poured in to take jobs in the converted auto plants. Many of these new workers were women attracted to the war plants by patriotic appeals, high wages, and the general shortage of male workers. Most had families and had previously been taught that their "place" was at home, but now

they had to be convinced that their place was on the job! Thousands of women eventually took war jobs, including "men's" jobs, and "Rosie the Riveter" became a familiar figure. The percentage of women in the Detroit labor force rose from 23.1 percent in 1940 to 32.6 percent in 1944. When the war ended many of these women were thrown out of their jobs even though the vast majority wanted to continue working. (12)

The largest group of new workers came from outside the Detroit area. Thousands of black and white workers headed for the Motor City from rural Michigan and from other Midwestern and Southern cities. The population of the Detroit metropolitan area rose 22 percent from 1940 to 1943. (13) This massive immigration placed enormous strains on an already overcrowded city. The best description of life in wartime Detroit appeared in the UNITED AUTOMOBILE WORKER in response to an article in a local magazine describing the "easy" life of the war-plant worker.

Let Mr. Campbell rise at 6:00 A.M. in a frame house, unpainted for years inside and out; let him gulp a hasty breakfast, and then lunch box under his arm, rush out to wait for a crowded DSR bus; let him linger at the curb while several jammed buses go by until he can press his corpulence into one that affords a few inches of space; then let him mellow in the excitement of a noisy bumpy ride over Detroit's cavernous streets.

After having displayed his dog-tag and punched his time, let Mr. Campbell get into the swing of dynamic Detroit by eight or nine hours in the exhilarating air of a foundry, or an equal period under a welder's mask, or perhaps a day of light work screwing nuts or bolts until his eyes are bleary, no slackening up a bit during the eighth or ninth hour of course; no wasting of any of the excitement.

Home at the end of the day in that enchanting bus; this time the excitement won't be so keen, what with most of the tourists grimy, groggy, and sullen; wash up; a stiff drink of water; after that, there are a few hours of relaxation amid the salu-

brious summer aromas of Hamtramck, Del-Ray or other blighted areas.

You can hunt for an hour or two, if you prefer, Mr. Campbell. The garbage has been accumulating in the alley for weeks, perhaps a month, Rats have grown fat and numerous . . . .

There are other aspects of exciting Detroit you might discover, Harvey. Send your kids to a school where they can sit with fifty other youngsters in a single classroom; spend a carefree sultry Sunday afternoon at spacious Belle Isle, you might have the additional excitement of running into a race riot induced by overcrowding and frayed nerves . . . . (14)

Conditions in the towns and housing projects constructed especially for war workers were even worse. In a letter to Henry Ford, Brendan Sexton, then president of the UAW local at Willow Run (Ford's giant bomber plant just outside Detroit), noted :

Those who have lived in the communities around Willow Run have slept in barracks or "Jerry-built" shacks. They have waded through mud to shop and to get to work. They have stood in line to buy badly prepared, generally overpriced food.

They have waited in line for a bus every morning and have been herded to work in vehicles which they call "cattle cars."

They have lived in communities suffering from an almost complete lack of decent recreational and community facilities; and where medical and dental care often could not be bought at any price . . . .

Many have been subjected to scorn as "hillbilly" by the ignorant and in numerous places, they and their children have been socially ostracized because they were newcomers. (15)

This, then, was wartime Detroit. Harsh, uncompromising, and complex, it challenged even the most experienced city-dwellers. Conditions were similar, though never as extreme, in other centers of the auto industry throughout the country.



Rita Corbin

The coming of the war also transformed the whole framework of labor-management relations in the industry. Through a series of strikes and massive organizing drives, the UAW had proven itself to be a permanent part of the automobile industry. If ever a union had been built through militancy and struggle, it was the UAW. The no-strike pledge changed all this.

Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, UAW leaders, along with other AFL and CIO leaders, pledged not to strike against war production for the duration of the hostilities. This pledge transformed the trade unions into virtual company unions. They still possessed the power to negotiate, but not the power to act against hostile policies. This proved to be crippling to the UAW, which had always depended so much on the strike. As one local UAW newspaper put it :

Labor was like a powerful prize fighter whose hands are tied behind his back and who is confronted by an inferior opponent. Since the prize fighter is bound and all but helpless, the opponent can take liberties he would not dream of taking under usual ring conditions. (16)

Would workers be treated fairly by industry and government? Would their union leaders fight for them? Would the no-strike pledge prove to be a hindrance? Most auto workers seem to have adopted a wait-and-see attitude to these questions. The number of strikes in the industry declined drastically during the first nine months of 1942. By the end of the year, it had become obvious to many rank-and-filers that fair treatment was an illusion, that their union leaders would not fight for them, and that the no-strike pledge was a straitjacket of which management continually took advantage. At that point, the strike wave in the automobile industry began.

#### ANATOMY OF THE WARTIME WILDCAT

The strike wave exploded over the industry early in 1943 and quickly dispelled the public image of the happy, contented war worker. During the first two weeks of January, front-page headlines in the DETROIT NEWS announced:

9,000 IDLE IN WILDCAT FORD STRIKE  
TANK ENGINE TIE-UP AT CHRYSLER'S  
ARMY ACTS TO PUNISH FORD STRIKERS  
1,300 WAR WORKERS IN WILDCAT STRIKE  
8 BOHN WILDCAT STRIKERS FIRED BY ARMY

The strikes tapered off toward the end of the month, quickly began again, and continued intermittently throughout the year. The annual total reached 153, three times the number during the previous year, or one almost every other day. Slightly more than one-fourth of the workers in the industry participated in these wildcats. (18)

Strikes increased in 1944 and soon reached a crisis point as Detroit became the "strike capital" of the nation. Speak-

ing before a Congressional investigating committee, George Romney, then managing director of the Automotive Council for War Production, asserted: "There have been more strikes and work stoppages and more employees directly involved during the first 11 months of 1944 than in any other period of the industry's history." (19) He also said that there were more strikes involving more workers in 1944 than in "all the shameful sit-down strikes of 1937", and further complained that these statistics underestimated the problem because they did not include the 800 strikes not recorded by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. (20)

These statistics also show that a substantial majority of auto workers participated in the wildcat strikes. In 1944 alone, slightly more than 50 percent of the workers took part in a strike. (21) A conservative estimate would place the total number of auto workers who participated in a wildcat strike sometime during the war, at 60 to 65 percent. (22) Those auto workers who continued to honor the no-strike pledge, and this included the whole UAW leadership, formed a minority within their own union. The pledge was destroyed in the UAW, not by debates or resolutions, but by open revolt.

The strikes continued up to and through V-E and V-J days, but the approach of victory did little to stem the discontent. When the war ended the UAW leadership, freed of the no-strike pledge, hastened to authorize any and every strike. The final months of 1945 saw the beginning of the General Motors strike, the opening round in the fight American workers would wage to recover what they had lost during the war.

During the Second World War, strikers generally stood alone. They faced "not only the employer and the government (including the armed forces), but also their own top bureaucrats and almost all Allied labor leaders and coordinating labor councils." (23) Strikers were fired by the employers, the government, and the union. (24) As early as January, 1943 auto workers were fired and informally blacklisted from further defense work. (25) Some companies proved reluctant because of the labor shortage, to fire one-time strikers, but few showed any reluctance in firing strike organizers or frequent participants. Despite these

dangers, auto workers continued to strike throughout the war years.

The wildcats in auto varied greatly as to size, cause, duration, and form. The average (median) strike involved 350 to 400 workers, while the mean average rose from approximately 850 in 1942 to 1,700 in 1944. Some strikes included as few as six workers and others as many as 20,000. In 1944 alone, there were five strikes of over 10,000 workers and two of over 20,000. (26) The length of the average strike increased as the war continued. In 1942, the average wildcat lasted 1.5 days; by 1944, it had increased to 3.5. (27) Some strikes lasted only a day, while others went a week or more.

Strike causes also varied greatly. Some seemed frivolous; most were intensely serious. One of the less "serious" (to those who have never worked the second shift!) started over the fact that they were getting off at 1:30 and the beer gardens closed at 2:30. They did not get a chance to get to the beer gardens. These were women! (28) The most frequent cause of strikes appears to have been discipline. Workers often struck when management discharged stewards or other workers. Other common causes included poor or hazardous working conditions, long hours, and high production standards. (29)

Harriet Arnow describes one of these walkouts in her brilliantly perceptive novel *THE DOLLMAKER*. An auto-worker fresh from Appalachia told of "a walkout in the paint department after more than twenty had passed out with the heat; not just the heat either; the ventilating system had gone bad and the guys said the place was full of fumes, so full that Bender (a militant worker) had got the whole trim department to walk out in protest." Another wildcat took place at the Ford Willow Run plant when women workers refused to wear a company-prescribed suit, "a blue cover-all thing with three buttons on the back with a drop suit." When the company began disciplining women who showed up without the suit, the rest of the women struck, and that, apparently, was the end of the suit.

Conflict over wages occurred less often than might be expected. Apparently, the high wages in the automobile industry, a result of the long hours of overtime, minimized

this as a factor. A list of strikes in all automotive plants during December, 1944 and January, 1945 shows only four (out of a hundred and eighteen) that could be attributed to wages. (30) Harry Elmer Barnes reported a somewhat higher percentage at Ford, but still only one of four or five chief causes. (31)

Strike tactics also varied, with the walkout being most common. (32) Workers would march through their department or plant, then move outside. If the next shift was arriving, and the dispute not yet settled, a picket line might be set up. The workers remained off the job until the dispute got settled or the union convinced them to return to work.

Strikers also used sitdowns and barricades, though somewhat less frequently. More commonly, workers would simply put down their tools, stop working, and stand around until the company recognized their grievance. (33) Barricades were used occasionally, but always with the greatest effect. At Ford, using a modified form, "4,000 workers in the production foundry staged a riot. They surrounded the superintendent's office and threw large steel castings at the office windows of the superintendent and his aides. Plant protection men had to escort the superintendent off the grounds under armed guard." (34) Occasionally, sympathy strikes developed. At Ford, ten percent of the 250-odd wildcats in 1943 were sympathy stoppages. (35) Occasionally, workers heard about strikes in other departments, plants, or companies and decided, independently, to strike in sympathy.

Once a strike began it often followed a somewhat stylized course of development. As one automobile worker described it:

First day, everybody would just simply go home.  
Second day, start milling around the local union and the arguments would start something like this, "Well you know we're on an illegal strike, companies never going to give anything until we get back to work."

Third day, the International officers would begin stirring themselves, under the phone calls and



pressure from management to get in over there and start doing something....

On the succeeding day, usually, the more militant guys would be feeling that they better get back in or they'd be the particular victims of the wildcats, they'd get discharged. (36)

The following day presumably saw the end of the strike as the company made some concessions under rank-and-file and union pressure or some workers were fired. If the latter occurred a new and even larger strike would often be triggered. Not all of the wildcats actually followed this pattern exactly, but it appears to be an accurate general description.

After a strike began the strike leaders would organize meetings "to keep up the morale of those that were out." At these meetings the "workers would get a chance to denounce the local union officers, if they didn't seem militant enough, or more particularly the local president, or the International man if he had sufficient stomach to show up." These were not official meetings and were "almost always declared illegal.... They were not organized and they remained wildcat strikes and wildcat meetings." (37)

Rank-and-file leaders emerged during the strikes, and many of them subsequently were elected officers of their local unions. In one instance, Larry Yost, a worker at the Ford Rouge plant, led what one historian called "perhaps the worst wildcat strike of the whole period.... involving some 5,000 men in the aircraft engine building on March 14, 1944. They barricaded the entrance and roads around the building, staged a general riot, and stole the case histories of several leading UAW agitators from labor relations files." (38) Yost was then elected vice-president of the aircraft unit, and subsequently served as a delegate to the 1944 UAW convention, where he was a leader in the fight against the no-strike pledge. In some locals where there were a number of strikes and the elected officers vehemently opposed them, the rank-and-file leaders became the unofficial but de-facto leadership.

Where local officials openly or covertly supported strikes, they retained their authority despite the efforts of International UAW leaders to oust them. In one such strike at Kelsey Hayes

they just couldn't get these guys back to work . . . . One set of bureaucrats after another would go to that local to get these guys back to work, and after they'd make their long speech, the question is, "what do you say, Moon (that was the president of their local), what do you want us to do Moon." They listened to Moon Mullins, they didn't listen to Walter Reuther, R.J. Thomas, or Frankenstein or Addes or anybody else. (39)

When local officials were removed from office by the International for supporting strikes, they were invariably re-elected. This happened in part because of the strong traditions of local autonomy and rank-and-file democracy in the UAW (which the International was just beginning to restrict), but also because the workers resisted the International's inflexible opposition to all strikes. As one worker put it, "The only language they (the auto companies) understand is the language of the strike, and, I say, let's give it to them." (40)

Little is known about the methods used to organize the wildcats, but it should be obvious that some form of informal organization must have existed to permit workers to carry out hundreds of wildcat strikes in the face of such powerful opposition from the government, the auto companies, and the union. Some have argued that the war destroyed the "primary work groups" which facilitate the organization of "unofficial" strikes, but this is only partially true. (41) The pre-war work groups must have been largely disrupted by the war and the draft, but they appear to have been quickly replaced. Apparently the tremendous conflicts, tensions, and problems of the war years quickened the development of these informal ties, and thus a process which normally required several years took a year or less. The development of these rudimentary "organizations" permitted workers, using their own resources, to function outside and at times against the trade-union structure.

The strikes spread unevenly through the industry. Some companies experienced more than others; within companies, some plants had more. At the Briggs Motor Co., there were 28 strikes in 1943 and 114 in 1944. (42) Timken-Detroit Axle had 36 stoppages in the 15-month period ending

December 31, 1944. The most strike-plagued of the auto companies, Ford, saw 773 strikes between the signing of the UAW contract in 1941 and the end of the war. (43) This averages to one almost every other day!

Most auto companies experienced some strikes. The list of the 118 strikes in December, 1944 and January, 1945 reveals the following totals: Packard 7, Briggs 16, Ford 29 (including numerous small ones), General Motors 14, and Chrysler 30 (including numerous smaller ones). (44) Some companies, such as Briggs and Ford, where management was intensely and historically hostile to labor, had an exceptional number of strikes. Others, especially the smaller parts suppliers, had few. All of the Big Three and most of the major independents had sizable numbers of strikes.

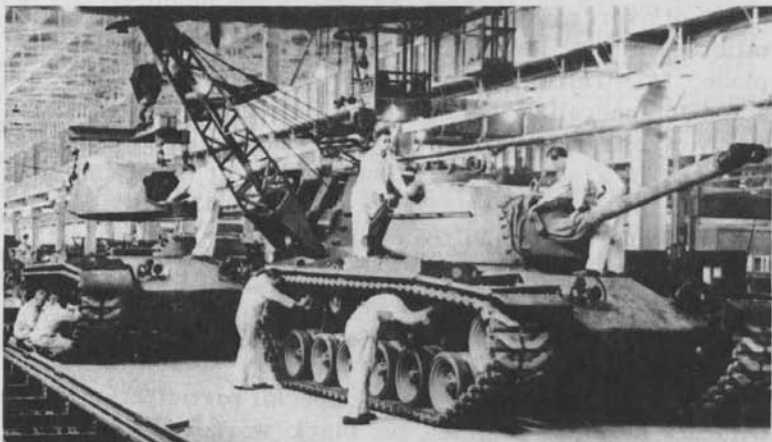
Most strikes took place in or around Detroit. (45) Slightly less than one-half of the workers in the industry worked in the immediate area, and it was not surprising that the strike wave would center there. (46) Other factors were also important. The pre-war organizing drives and strikes (GM 1937, Chrysler 1939, and Ford 1941) took place in the Detroit area, and these workers became very experienced in the use of direct action. Also, the tensions and frustrations of wartime living were worse in Detroit than in other areas of the industry. The Motor City had more than its share of overcrowding, racial problems, and poor transportation. The city looked like a keg of dynamite ready to explode. (47) Third, Detroit was a one-industry town. This acted to generalize the discontent throughout the city. Similarly, arbitrary management policies affected thousands of workers in a general way. Finally, Detroit was a center of radical anti-war organizations. Groups such as the Socialist Workers Party and the Workers Party, though rather small in numbers, exhorted auto workers to oppose the no-strike pledge and to strike if necessary. This helped create an atmosphere in which the idea of striking became acceptable to many workers in the area.

There is little evidence of any special participation in the wildcats by either women or black workers. Newspaper stories provide few accounts of women's participation in the strikes despite the fact that the number of women working in the auto plants had increased more than 50% over

pre-war levels. (48) Similarly, there are few recorded instances of women leading wildcats, but this certainly indicates more about the male workers' prejudices than about the women's enthusiasm for leadership.

Black workers generally were confined to the worst jobs in the auto plants. The foundries, especially, contained large numbers of blacks, and these areas often became the site of numerous wildcats. Black workers appear to have participated equally with white workers in these strikes. The thrust of black organizing, however, was directed more against general working conditions, and this occasionally led to conflict with the white workers. (49)

The typical wildcat strike in the automobile industry thus involved 350 to 400 workers, lasted three to four days, and took the form of a simple walkout and picket line. Caused by poor working conditions or dissatisfaction over management policies, its organization was minimal. It most likely took place in one of the Detroit-area plants of the Big Three, but could have occurred anywhere in the industry. Auto workers apparently felt that the strikes got results and that a small victory or possible defeat seemed preferable to the endless delays of the War Labor Board. (50)



*Ford workers building Patton tanks.*

## VARIETIES OF WILDCAT STRIKES

Few of the wildcats fit the description of a "typical" strike exactly — some differing greatly, others slightly. While none of the following strikes were "typical", they are useful as examples of the intense conflict in the wartime automobile industry.

The headline in the DETROIT NEWS for March 8, 1944 announced :

### U.S. SIFTS FORD MELEE AS 250 BEAT GUARD (51)

The article went on to describe a "disturbance" the previous evening in which 250 River Rouge Ford employees in the aircraft unit beat a plant protection guard when he attempted to intervene in a dispute between the workers and a Ford labor-relations man. The latter escaped, whereupon the workers moved to his office and "knocked over desks, destroyed documents, emptied files and broke windows." The disturbance continued for two hours until the workers finally dispersed.

What caused such a seemingly irrational outburst? Two Ford workers, ex-Marines and war veterans, had been caught smoking on the job. As this was their second "offense," they were fired and told to leave the plant. When other workers in their department heard this, they hurried to the labor-relations office and the "disturbance" began.

The inhumanity of Ford's action in discharging the men was attacked by the local union president when he said: "These men who have come through the horrors of battle with shattered nerves need a cigarette once in a while!" Although he did not condone violence or violations of the grievance procedure, "the incident was a spontaneous reaction against the inhuman and dictatorial treatment of the two veterans of this war." The discharged workers were quoted "as saying they would just as soon be in a prison camp as work under the conditions imposed by the labor relations division at the Ford plant." Despite showing sympathy, the union offered no protest when Ford announced the permanent discharge of ten employees and the indefinite suspension of ten others. In fact, representatives of the lo-

cal and the International attended the meeting that announced the suspensions !

On the following Monday 75 percent of the 5000 workers in the aircraft unit walked off the job half an hour early. They attempted to block the main highway leading to the plant with their cars, but most of the midnight workers (from the other division) crossed the "picket line." The workers finally withdrew the barricade the next morning and the active phase of the strike ended.

The Ford Motor Company issued the following statement :

This is another prize example of hoodlumism in unionism. This stoppage is the work of a handful of irresponsibles in the union and it is significant to see that these men can carry on continuously in the face of their own union.

Union control here in the pinches seems nil . . . . Obviously the company contract with such a union is about the same as a contract with Mr. Vesuvius for steady power.

Except here the eruptions are more frequent and just as uncontrollable.

The company then suspended 72 workers on charges ranging from "insubordination to inciting to riot." This brought the 10-day total of suspensions to 92, 30 of which were permanent discharges and 30 indefinite suspensions. The union attended every hearing at which suspensions were announced.

The combination of an intensely repressive company response and the union's support of the company proved too much for the rank-and-file workers of the Rouge aircraft unit. Several months later, they elected a strike leader, Larry Yost, vice-president of the aircraft unit. At the UAW convention the following September, 15 of the 17 delegates from the unit voted to rescind the no-strike pledge.

Another interesting and important strike occurred in May, 1944 at the Highland Park, Michigan plant of the Chrysler Corporation (Local 490). (52) The strike began when two union stewards threw a Teamsters union worker from the plant. Three company supervisors then identified the stewards to be fired. In response, a group of workers

threw the supervisors out of the plant. Chrysler then fired 16 of these workers. In a massive show of opposition to these firings 10,000 workers walked off their jobs.

Workers from five smaller Chrysler plants joined the strike in sympathy. The Detroit regional War Labor Board and George Addes, secretary-treasurer of the International UAW, ordered the men back to work but met with little success. Despite increasing pressure, the strikers voted three to one to stay out unless the company agreed to reinstate the fired workers. The UAW International Executive Board continued to threaten disciplinary action against the local union, but the workers stood firm. Finally, the executive board of the local gave in and ordered its members back to work. Thinking it had won as the strikers slowly filtered back to work, the International pressed its luck by suspending 14 of the officers of Local 490, including the president, Bill Jenkins. The rebellion flared up again as the workers walked out and picketed the plant. A rank-and-file committee distributed leaflets saying :

Stick to your guns. Fight for the boys who fight for you. The company fired part of the leaders. The International UAW-CIO fired the rest. We need pickets.

R. J. Thomas, International UAW president, angrily asserted that "the UAW-CIO today faces one of the greatest crises in its history" and that "strikes are destroying the UAW." The claims were rather exaggerated. The following day, upon the urging of the local president, 500 workers voted to end the strike and return to work.

Once again the rank-and-file had the final say when they re-elected most of the suspended officers in an election directed by the administrator appointed by the International to run the local. At the September, 1944 UAW convention, five of the seven Local 490 delegates (including four of the previously suspended officers) voted to rescind the no-strike pledge.

A third example is somewhat closer to the model of a typical strike. (53) On January 6, 1945, 18 employees in the Burr department at the Mack Avenue plant of the Briggs Manufacturing Company refused to do assigned work be-

cause "the management was trying to make employees... who get 97¢ an hour, do a rework operation (\$1.17 an hour), and the company refused to pay." The 18 resisting workers were joined by 1300 others when they walked off the job. Later the night shift of 850 joined them, and finally 3,500 additional day-shift employees also went out. This marked the 160th wartime strike at Briggs, the 31st to halt production. Despite orders from the Regional War Labor Board, the workers stayed out. At its height, there were 5,800 strikers and 6,700 idled by the strike. Briggs' attempt to cheat 18 workers out of 20¢ an hour idled more than 1,200 workers for six days. The strike ended the following week.

Wildcats were the most important, but not the only way in which rank-and-file workers expressed their discontent. Others included absenteeism, quit rates, violence, and the creation of an intra-union struggle to rescind the no-strike pledge.

Absenteeism ran high in the auto plants. Industry and government never agreed on the exact percentage of absentees, but both agreed it was too high. Even the lowest figure, 6 percent per day, was twice as high as the pre-war rate. (54)

Quit rates were also quite high. The labor shortage gave workers a rare freedom, which they freely used. This slowed somewhat after the labor freeze made it far more difficult to change jobs. (55) Women, middle-class workers, and Southerners, black and white, some of whom intended to work only for the duration of the war, often quit much earlier. (56) At the Ford Willow Run Bomber plant, for example, employment declined from 42,000 in July, 1943 to less than 20,000 in April, 1945 without layoffs. (57)

Violence frequently erupted in the plants. According to Harry Elmer Barnes, there was more violence in the Ford Rouge plant during the war than "was ever known in previous Ford history." (58) Conflict between workers and supervisors was common. In May, 1943, Ford produced a "long list of instances as showing that the workers have been terrorizing their supervisors." (59) The list included assaults and stabbings. In response to management provocations, workers occasionally destroyed company property. The most frequent targets were the offices of supervision, labor



relations, and plant protection. (60)

Nothing can be concluded from this minimal information with any certainty, but the combination of high absenteeism, high quit rates, and frequent violence is certainly suggestive of an enormous amount of discontent.



### FIGHTING THE "NO-STRIKE PLEDGE"

Rank-and-file auto workers carried their struggle into the union as well as on the job. Unlike the strikes themselves, the movement against the no-strike pledge never included a majority of auto workers, but for the first time a united UAW leadership faced mass opposition from the rank and file. (61) The struggle within the union intensified through the war years and finally reached a climax in early 1945 when over one-third of the participants in a special UAW referendum voted to rescind the pledge.

Some opposition to the pledge appeared early in the war. At the CIO Auto Workers Emergency Conference in April, 1942 one worker, speaking out against the no-strike pledge and the Equality of Sacrifice program, argued that "We gave up our right to strike, our brothers and sons are dying in the trenches. Can anyone show any signs that the men who sign paychecks have made one sacrifice?" (62) Many auto

workers quickly learned the real meaning of the pledge as they saw the corporations take advantage of it and "as the unions became impotent, unable to enforce their contracts, and helpless in settling grievances." (63)

Conflict appeared whenever the union held a meeting, conference, or convention. At the 1942 UAW convention, rank-and-file discontent led to the passage of resolutions criticizing government and the industry and threatening to withhold further cooperation. (64) The 1943 Michigan State CIO convention which the UAW dominated by virtue of its huge membership in the state passed a resolution rescinding the pledge "unless assurances made to labor at the time we gave up our right to strike are immediately and effectively put into operation." (65)

The first nine months of 1944 saw the largely unorganized movement against the pledge progress from a mere nuisance to the UAW International Executive Board to a serious threat. This growth coincided with an enormous increase in the number of wildcat strikes. The period also witnessed the formation of the Rank-and-File caucus. Formed under the impetus of the Workers Party, a small Trotskyist group, the caucus sought the complete rescinding of the no-strike pledge. (66) While it never became very large or especially effective, the Rank-and-File caucus did serve as a focal point for opposition to the pledge before, during, and after the 1944 UAW convention. The number of UAW locals opposed to the pledge also rose greatly during these months as some locals elected opponents of the pledge and others saw old leaders change their ideas.

The 1944 UAW convention proved to be the high point in the campaign against the no-strike pledge. When the convention voted down all resolutions on the pledge (including one reaffirming it), this "freaked everybody out. The goddamn pork-choppers on the platform were turning blue, green, pink . . . In point of fact there is no longer a no-strike pledge." (67) In an uproar, all factions in the convention then united to pass a compromise resolution which temporarily reaffirmed the pledge until a referendum of the entire UAW membership could make a final decision. (68) The rank-and-file forces had won a stunning victory: rank-and-file discontent had become so strong that in the midst of a

war the International leaders of the world's largest union could not pass a resolution supporting their war policies!

The referendum took place in February, 1945, and in April the Executive Board announced that the pledge had been reaffirmed by a 2-1 majority of the 300,000 votes cast. (69) The International leaders of the UAW saw the results as a tremendous vindication of their policies, and it was to a certain extent. On the other hand, as one opponent of the pledge put it, "Before, during, and after the vote the majority of UAW members wildcatted all over the place. So what the hell is the significance of that vote!" (70) In fact, more auto workers participated in wildcat strikes in 1944 than voted in the referendum! (71) Had every wildcat striker voted "NO" in the referendum the pledge would have been rescinded by a substantial margin. However, it would certainly be unfair to label workers who struck against their employers, their union and the government "apathetic", simply because they didn't vote in the referendum. The loss in the referendum and the approaching end of the war signaled the end of the movement against the no-strike pledge.

A close relationship existed between the strike wave and the movement against the pledge, for the strikes actually legitimized the anti-pledge movement. The International UAW leaders certainly feared the opponents of the pledge, but not nearly as much as they feared a rank-and-file opposition backed by a wave of wildcat strikes involving a majority of auto workers. Together, the fight against the pledge and the wildcats marked a resurgence of the old militancy that made the UAW such a success in its early years. This initial militancy had been reduced by the bureaucratization of the union, the stabilizing of labor-management relations, and the efforts of the auto companies until the wildcats erupted. The union and, even more, the automobile companies feared this militancy, and they lost little time in responding to the strikes.

#### THE COMPANY AND THE UNION RESPONSE

The automobile company owners and managers were among the worst reactionaries in the American ruling class. Throughout the 1920's and early 30's they success-

fully resisted all efforts at unionization, and only the tremendous organizing drives of the late 30's enabled the UAW to gain recognition. As late as the eve of the Second World War the automakers continued to view industrial unionism as a radical threat to their power.

No single approach characterized the auto companies' responses to the wildcats. (72) Some companies such as Briggs and Ford were intensely hostile, and they used every opportunity to rid themselves of troublesome workers. They responded to a wildcat by discharging everyone involved and then permitted only proven "innocents" to return.

Others such as General Motors and Chrysler proved milder in response. They generally discharged only those workers who led or frequently participated in strikes. Their pragmatism made them perfectly capable of compromising when their policies led to a wildcat.

A third group which included most of the independents and many of the parts suppliers was quite conciliatory. This reflected their small size and concentration into one or two plants which made them far more vulnerable than the big automakers. (73) Strikes still occurred at these companies, but generally they discharged only the most conspicuous leaders and often permitted them to return to work after the furor subsided.

The automakers found it difficult to put the blame for the wildcats on any one group. At first they blamed the union, but this proved absurd because the UAW vehemently opposed strikes. Then they blamed the "communists." This also proved incorrect, for the Communist Party wholeheartedly supported the war effort and the no-strike pledge. Finally, they blamed "small groups of militant people" who refused "to meet production standards which we know to be reasonable." (74) The companies never admitted that the workers had legitimate grievances. If they had revealed the repressive nature of their own labor policies, they would have exposed the causes of the wartime wave of wildcats.

The responses of the International leaders of the UAW to the strike wave also varied. At first, they tried to ignore the strikes. This proved easy enough in 1942, but became impossible as the number of strikes increased. Next, they attempted to minimize the importance of the strikes, but

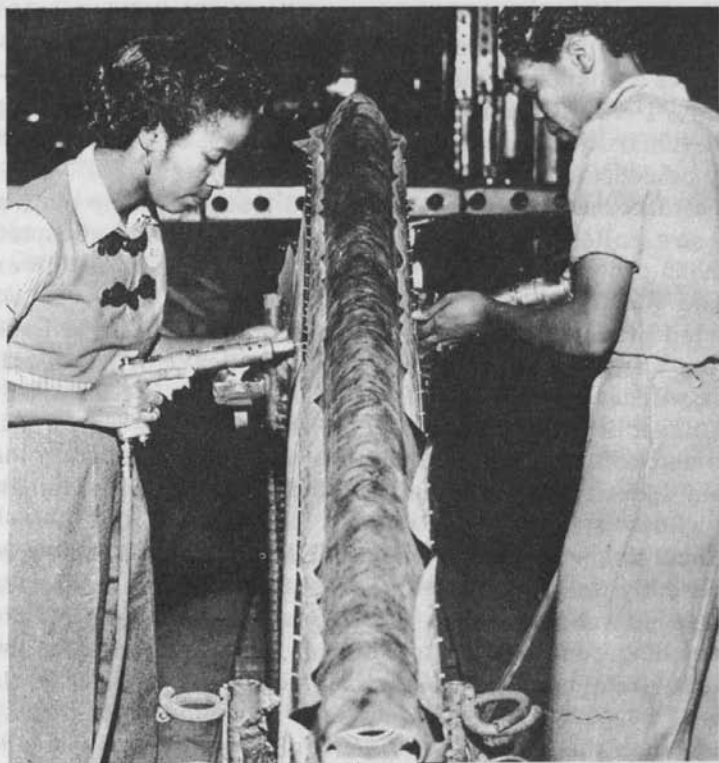
this also proved impossible. As the number of strikes increased, the international leaders grew desperate. According to R. J. Thomas, "any person who sets up picket lines is acting like an anarchist, not like a disciplined union man." (75) With the majority of autoworkers "acting like anarchists", the UAW leaders turned to repression. In February, 1944 they announced a new policy for disciplining "individual members, groups of members, or locals which may be responsible for unauthorized walkouts." (76)

The International Executive Board lost little time putting its new policy into action. In March, the Board accepted without protest the firing of 26 strike leaders at the River Rouge plant. (77) In June, the International removed all elected officials of Local 490, the Chrysler Highland Park plant, when they ignored an Executive Board order to call off a wildcat strike. (78)

This policy of repression continued until the war's end. The auto companies fired hundreds of strikers and when the union agreed they were guilty. But repression failed to halt the wildcat strikes.

Local union officials within the UAW responded somewhat differently to the strikes. Some supported the no-strike pledge as vehemently as the International officers and did everything possible to stop strikes. Others vacillated, and a third group openly opposed the pledge. Few local officials openly supported the wildcats, but many did little to stop them once they began. Some local officials secretly organized strikes. On the whole, their closer relationship to the workers in the shops meant they were more sympathetic to rank-and-file problems. The following exchange illustrates the difference between local and national attitudes. Writing to Jess Ferrazza, John Gibson, president of the Michigan CIO Council, claimed that "if some of you fellows had to assume the responsibility and take the heat that is poured onto labor leaders in general, there wouldn't be so much talk about revocation of no-strike pledges and maybe we would have less strikes." (79) Ferrazza, president of Local 212 (Briggs Motor Co.), responded angrily: "I don't know how many people you have to take the heat from, but I have the Army, Navy, the International on one side and the 20,000 rank-and-file members of Local 212 on the other side. So

when you talk about heat and assuming responsibility, brother, we are the ones that have it." (80)



## CONCLUSIONS

Grievances alone cannot explain this tremendous wave of wildcat strikes. Arbitrary management, long hours, and poor working conditions have always been a part of the automobile industry, yet they never produced such a strike wave. An adequate explanation must go beyond the specifics of each strike to an analysis of the "atmosphere" or milieu in which the strikes took place. There seem to be at least nine separate factors which contributed to the strike wave, four of which were primary or crucial, five of which were secondary.

Among the primary factors were :

(1) The auto companies' attitude toward labor during the war was extremely hostile. The auto makers had not yet accepted independent industrial unionism; at best, they tolerated it. Their attitude would have been hostile, war or no war. But management knew the UAW had given up the right to strike, and that it could, with little fear of reprisal, effect any policy it desired. If the union or the workers complained, they were told to "take it to the War Labor Board." The one-to-two-year wait before the WLB meant that the corporations had a free hand in the intervening period. As one radical newspaper asserted :

Armed with the knowledge that the labor leaders were enforcing the no-strike pledge and that the President had insisted upon its loyal execution, no matter what provocations faced the workers, the bosses have done everything in their power to violate agreements, hinder collective bargaining, harass the shop steward system, uphold downgrading classifications, stall on rate increases and a hundred and one other grievances which the unions have. (81)

In the face of such hostility, the workers had two choices; either endure the injustice for a year or two in the hope of a favorable judgment; or strike.

(2) The special conditions of the auto industry and its workers produced a certain potentiality for strikes. The attitude of the auto worker toward his job has historically differed from that of other workers. Writing somewhat later, Robert Blauner noted that

The automobile worker's job dissatisfaction is a reflection of his independence and dignity; he does not submit as easily as other manual workers to alienating work.... The auto worker quits his job more frequently than other workers. He is characteristically a griper, a man who talks back to his foreman.... He presses grievances through a union steward system and engages in wildcat

strikes and revolts against the union bureaucracy itself more frequently than other workers. On the job, he resorts to illegitimate methods of asserting some control over his immediate work process. (82)

Also, the unions in the auto industry had been organized only a relatively few years before the war began and large sectors of the industry remained unorganized. Labor-management relations were largely undefined, and most workers believed the best way to handle grievances was to strike. Auto workers were only too happy to return management's hostility. These factors produced a certain predisposition to strike, or an understanding that if any industry would experience a strike wave, it would be the auto industry.

(3) Workers continued to sacrifice for victory, while the automakers made huge profits. Autoworkers soon learned that the auto companies had no desire for equality of sacrifice. Corporate profits doubled and executive salaries skyrocketed. (83) At General Motors, net profit rose from \$47 million during the first six months of 1942 to \$69 million in the same period one year later. (84) UAW and radical newspapers brought this information to the rank and file and they compared their sacrifices to management profits.

(4) The worries, tensions, and anxieties of wartime life reached crisis points. The intense problems of wartime make it necessary to

think of people with patience frayed by the fatigue of war-prolonged work-weeks and by the snapping of war-strained nerves and tempers. Think of the over-crowded dwellings for which exorbitant rent is paid and of competition to obtain such slum shelters. Think of the saloons, the pool parlors and the movies as the only accessible recreational facilities to furnish much needed respite from these crowded living conditions. (85)

In Detroit these oppressive conditions produced wildcat strikes, but they also produced frequent racial conflicts. (86)



Wartime living produced its own mental and physical problems. By the end of 1942, many of the workers "working 54 hours a week and many as high as 10 and 11 hours a day, seven days a week, are already complaining of weight loss, loss of appetite, fatigue, loss of energy, loss of ambition, nervous irritability, and some indigestion." (87)

Among the secondary factors were the following :

(a) The wartime shortage of labor gave workers a sense of power. They knew the value of their labor, and they knew that other jobs were available. If they didn't like something, they complained; if it didn't improve, they struck; if conditions got worse, they quit. This sense of power, small as it actually was, gave workers a certain leverage in their relations with the auto companies. Management could go only so far.

(b) The increasing cost of living and the declining quality of life angered many workers. Of all the United Nations, only the United States kept wages below the rise in the cost of living. (88) To use the official cost-of-living index, said one observer, "in discussing money matters with workers produces only guffaws. What matters is not the dubiously motivated fairy tales of academic statisticians, but the living reality." (89) The long hours of overtime meant a rise in total income, but price rises, tax increases, and the purchase of War Bonds limited real income. The price-wage freeze stabilized the cost of living somewhat, but workers continued to feel pressured. When overtime decreased, near the end of the war, incomes plummeted.

The quality of life also dropped. The cost-of-living index never measured the decline in the quality of consumer goods, the apartments subdivided while the rent remained the same, or the decreasing quality of overworked mass-transportation services. To the long working hours and the wartime frustrations was added a declining quality of life. The combination became explosive.

(c) Workers feared the problems of reconversion and the expected postwar depression. Government, industry, labor leaders, and rank-and-file workers all assumed the end of the war would bring a catastrophic depression. Layoffs began and working hours were cut in some plants as early as the end of 1943. In one case, workers held a sit-down to

demand jobs at an airplane plant scheduled for closing. (90) Even the official labor leaders became worried. George Meany, then secretary-treasurer of the AFL, said:

Labor has no illusion as to what is going to happen when our war industries are demobilized, when, instead of workers being told each day to produce more and more for victory, they are told that the plant is shutting down. We have no illusions as to what is then going to happen in regard to overtime, bonuses, pay incentives, and such things as that. We know that these things will go out the window. (91)

Workers knew the labor shortage would end and be replaced by massive unemployment. As such, they developed a "get it while you can" attitude toward wages, benefits, and working conditions.

(d) The heritage of militancy in some plants and in some parts of the country resulted in many strikes. Many of the plants which had taken the lead in building the UAW during the Thirties — for example, the auto plants of Flint, Michigan, especially the Chevrolet plant, site of the 1937 sitdown — also took the lead in opposing the no-strike pledge and in wildcatting if necessary. The workers in these plants had developed a tradition of militancy which they were not about to discard in order to satisfy labor's new bureaucrats.

(e) The problems caused by workers unfamiliar with company discipline compounded the other contradictions. As a result of the labor shortage, hundreds of thousands of non-industrial workers, including Southern blacks and whites from rural and mining areas, women who had never worked in industry, and former white-collar workers, were integrated into the automotive work force. Many found it difficult to accept the long hours, rigorous pace, and strict discipline of industrial work. They identified with neither union nor management and used the wildcat strike to fight against their exploitation and oppression.

Independently, and in combination, these factors caused the strike wave in the automobile industry and led thousands of workers to defy their union officials, their em-

ployers, the U.S. government, and the military. This reality was far different from what most labor historians would have us believe.

An accurate labor history of the war years has yet to be written. When it is, it will explain, among other things, how the no-strike pledge transformed labor unions into virtual company unions, how rank-and-file workers proved unwilling to give up the gains they had won in the previous decade of struggle and how, in order to defend these gains, they were prepared to strike. It will also explain the failure of the radical left during the war years. The Left represented no real alternative for militant, class-conscious rank and filers who supported the war, but who also wanted to defend the worker's interests. The Communist Party supported the war, but subordinated the worker's day-to-day problems in its quest for "national unity."

Earl Browder, then Party chairman, painted an ominous picture when he wrote that "the threatened revocation of the no-strike policy will release uncontrollable forces that may easily engulf our country in chaos and stab our armies in the back. Strike threats will quickly merge into an endless series of "little strikes" and these will grow into big ones. The whole concept of orderly adjustment of our war-time economy under the guidance of the government will quickly be wrecked." (92)

The Trotskyist groups defended the worker's immediate interests, but opposed the war and thus isolated themselves. The strike wave in the automobile industry emerged spontaneously out of working-class discontent, and its leaders came from among the rank and file. As admirable as this may be, the abject failure of the Left begs for explanation.

A fuller account of these years must move outside the confines of trade unionism and discuss the industrialization of thousands of Southern whites and blacks, the entrance into and subsequent expulsion from the labor force of millions of women, and the crucial role of the war years in integrating industrial unions into the corporate structure. Hopefully, this paper has helped a little.



## EPILOGUE

*Martin Glaberman*

The struggle against the no-strike pledge in the UAW during World War II is one of the most significant experiences of the American working class. It is particularly important to radicals concerned with the problems of working-class consciousness.

Jennings' article provides an interesting illumination of the vast gulf between ordinary workers and union leaders, even in the "militant" days of the UAW. But the event which demands the most extensive study and analysis is the contradictory combination of a membership referendum which upholds the no-strike pledge and a wave of wildcat strikes which involves a majority of the membership. That simple contradiction destroys nine-tenths of the theories of intellectuals about working-class consciousness by indicating its complexity and the fact that it is not a purely verbal reality. That is, consciousness is as much activity as formal verbalized expression.

Although the expression of that contradiction is clearest in the referendum vote of 1944, that is not the only time that the opposition between verbal belief and activity has appeared in the American working class. During the Vietnam war there were a number of occasions when workers, who presumably supported the American government in that war, interfered with the war effort in strike activity. Strikes against North American Aviation, Olin-Mathieson, Missouri-Pacific Railroad (to name a few) provide examples.

Lenin once said that one cannot equate the patriotism of the worker with the patriotism of the bourgeoisie. What events of this kind indicate is that when patriotism and class interests conflict to a serious degree, often enough, no matter how he rationalizes the contradiction, the worker places his class interests above what he feels to be the needs of the nation. It is useful to remember that American workers, in their ordinary class-struggle activities, have interfered with more war production and shipment than all the anti-war demonstrations put together.

There are, of course, those who will complain that these class-struggle activities were not carried out "consciously." I suppose that there were those who complained that Russian workers created soviets in 1905 in response to a Czarist attack on a parade of old women led by an Orthodox Priest, and not consciously in order to establish a socialist society. Well, I guess we can't have everything.



## FOOTNOTES

This article is a reduced version of a longer study, copies of which can be obtained by writing to the author at 2213 N. Seeley, Chicago, Illinois 60647.

1. A wildcat strike does not have the approval of the officially recognized union in that plant, company, or industry. In some cases a strike may be approved by the local union but not by the national or international, which may declare it a wildcat.

2. Joseph Rayback, *A HISTORY OF AMERICAN LABOR* (New York: Free Press, 1966), p. 373.

3. *NEW YORK TIMES*, November 16, 1945, p. 4.

4. Irving Howe and B. J. Widick, *THE UAW AND WALTER REUTHER* (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 124. R. J. Thomas, *UNITED AUTOMOBILE WORKER*, May 15, 1944, p. 4.

5. "Strikes in 1946," *MONTHLY LABOR REVIEW*, LXIV (May, 1947), p. 782.

6. "Strikes and Lockouts in 1944," *MONTHLY LABOR REVIEW*, LX (May, 1945), p. 961.

7. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *IMPACT OF THE WAR ON THE DETROIT AREA* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), p. 11. (Hereafter referred to as *IMPACT*.)

8. "Anger in Detroit," *BUSINESS WEEK*, January 17, 1942, p. 58.

9. "Auto Employment Drops," *BUSINESS WEEK*, February 14, 1942, p. 75.

10. "Anger in Detroit," p. 58.

11. "Highlights of Automotive Industry's War Record," *AUTOMOTIVE WAR PRODUCTION*, September, 1945, p. 8.

12. "Women Workers in Detroit-Willow Run," *THE DETROITER*, October 30, 1944, p. 3. Joan Ellen Frey, "Women in the War Economy," *THE REVIEW OF RADICAL POLITICAL ECONOMICS*, IV (July, 1972), 40-57.

13. "Detroit's Population Up 22%," *THE DETROITER*, July 19, 1943, p. 5.

14. "Detroit... Rats and Harvey Campbell," *UNITED AUTOMOBILE WORKER*, May 1, 1945, p. 6. Campbell, the Executive Vice-President of the Detroit Chamber of Commerce, wrote the article which triggered the union's response.

15. "Bomber Local President Puts Issue Up to Ford," *UNITED AUTOMOBILE WORKER*, June 1, 1945, p. 1.

16. "No-Strike Pledge Has Not Stopped Strikes," *VOICE OF LOCAL 212*, September 14, 1944, p. 2.

17. *DETROIT NEWS*, January 1-13, p. 1.

18. "Strikes in 1943," *MONTHLY LABOR REVIEW*, LVIII (May, 1944), 931.

19. U.S. Congress, Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program, *INVESTIGATION OF THE NATIONAL DEFENSE PROGRAM: PART 28: MANPOWER PROBLEMS IN DETROIT*, 79th Cong. 1st sess., 1945 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office,

1945), p. 13560. (Hereafter referred to as INVESTIGATION.) The Automotive Council for War Production was a group composed of all the major automobile companies.

20. IBID.

21. "Strikes and Lockouts in 1944," MONTHLY LABOR REVIEW, LX (May, 1945), 961.

22. This is my own computation based on governmental figures. In 1944, 50.5 percent of the auto workers struck; in 1943, 26.8 percent, and in 1942, 8.4 percent. To this total must be added an unknown but certainly large percentage for 1945. The total is over 100 percent, but allowance must be made for workers who participated in more than one strike, thus reducing the total to approximately 60 to 65 percent.

23. Sherry Mangan, "State of the Nation: Minority Report," FORTUNE, November, 1943, p. 139. (Hereafter referred to as "Minority Report".)

24. The UAW never actually fired anyone; but it did expel strikers from the union, and at Ford this resulted in a discharge because of the union shop.

25. DETROIT NEWS, January 6, 1943, p. 1.

26. "Strikes and Lockouts in 1944," 963-964. The average size of the strike was computed by dividing the number of strikers by the number of strikes. It should be kept in mind that this picture of a typical strike is based on Bureau of Labor Statistics figures, and these do not include strikes of less than eight hours duration or involving fewer than six workers. If information about these strikes were available, the picture of the typical strike might be somewhat different.

27. My own computation arrived at by dividing the number of man days idle by the number of strikers.

28. Sam Sage, Oral History Interview, United Automobile Workers Archives, Wayne State University, p. 32. (Archives hereafter referred to as UAWA.)

29. Harry Elmer Barnes, "Labor Policies of the Ford Motor Company" (unpublished manuscript, Ford Motor Company Archives, 1944), Chapter 16, p. 25. (Hereafter referred to as LABOR POLICIES.)

30. U.S. Congress, Senate, WARTIME RECORD OF STRIKES AND LOCKOUTS 1940-45, compiled by Rosa Lee Swafford, 79th Cong., 2nd sess., 1946 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), pp. 9-13. (Hereafter referred to as WARTIME RECORD.) For a similar conclusion as to the relative lack of importance of wage disputes during the First World War (and the surrounding years) see the article by David Montgomery entitled "The 'New Unionism' and the Transformation of Worker's Consciousness in America, 1909-1922", prepared for the Anglo-American Conference on the Study of Comparative Labor History.

31. Barnes, "Labor Policies," appendix, n.p.

32. Erwin Baur, private interview, Detroit, Michigan, November 15, 1972.

33. Art Hughes, Oral History Interview, UAWA, p. 20.

34. Barnes, "Labor Policies," Chapter 16, n.p. There are two different drafts of Barnes' manuscript in the Ford Motor Company Archives (hereafter referred to as FMCA), and only one has page numbers.

35. IBID.

36. Baur, interview.

37. IBID.

38. Barnes, "Labor Policies," Chapter 16, n.p.

39. John Zupan, Oral History Interview, UAWA

40. Michigan CIO, PROCEEDINGS OF THE SIXTH CONVENTION (Flint, Mich., 1943).

41. M. Guttman, "Primary (Informal) Work Groups," RADICAL AMERICA. VI (May-June 1972), p. 87. See also Jerome F. Scott and George C. Homan, "Reflections on Wildcat Strikes," AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW, XII (June, 1947), p. 283.

42. Letter, J. H. Taylor to Walter Reuther, March 23, 1945, Local 212 Papers, UAWA.

43. U.S. Congress, INVESTIGATION, p. 13795. Also see Allan Nevins, *FORD: DECLINE AND REBIRTH, 1933-1962* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 508.

44. U.S. Congress, WARTIME RECORD, pp. 9-13.

45. This includes the surrounding suburbs of Hamtramck, Dearborn, Highland Park, and Willow Run (Ypsilanti).

46. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *IMPACT OF THE WAR ON THE DETROIT AREA* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), p. 2. (Hereafter referred to as *IMPACT*.)

47. "Detroit is Dynamite," LIFE, pp. 15-23.

48. See the following articles for a wider view of the role of women during the war: Joan Ellen Frey, "Women in the War Economy," THE REVIEW OF RADICAL POLITICAL ECONOMICS, IV (July, 1972), pp. 40-57, and Sheila Tobias and Lisa Anderson, "Rosie the Riveter," MS.

49. For a first-hand account of these struggles see Matthew Ward, *INDIGNANT HEART* (New York: New Books, 1952).

50. President Roosevelt created the War Labor Board to handle all unresolvable disputes between labor and industry. The number of such disputes became so great that, even after the creation of regional Boards, a dispute might require twelve to twenty-four months to resolve.

51. This description of the aircraft strike is based on the following articles: DETROIT NEWS, March 9, 1944, p. 1; March 10, 1944, p. 1; March 15, 1944, p. 1; March 16, 1944, p. 1; March 17, 1944, p. 1; March 18, 1944, p. 2.

52. This description of the Chrysler strikes is based on the following articles: DETROIT NEWS, May 20, 1944, p. 1; May 21, 1944, p. 1; May 22, 1944, p. 1; May 23, 1944, p. 1; May 24, 1944, p. 1; May 25, 1944, p. 1; May 26, 1944, p. 1; May 28, 1944, p. 1; May 29, 1944, p. 1.

53. This description of the Briggs strike is based on the following articles: DETROIT NEWS, January 7, 1945, p. 1; January 8, 1945, p. 1; January 9, 1945, p. 1; January 10, 1945, p. 1; January 12, 1945, p. 1.



54. DETROIT NEWS, February 15, 1943, p. 1. Donald Nelson, chairman of the War Production Board, claimed that absenteeism in Detroit plants was running eight to ten percent per day. The Automotive Council for War Production claimed a rate of "about 6 percent."

55. Joel Seidman, AMERICAN LABOR FROM DEFENSE TO RECONVERSION (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 160-161. The job freeze came on April 8, 1943 in President Roosevelt's "hold-the-line" order which prohibited defense workers (and other essential workers) from changing jobs unless it benefitted the war effort.

56. The best "study" of the experiences of migrants to Detroit during the war is Harriet Arnow, THE DOLLMAKER (New York: the Mac-Millan Company, 1954). This brilliant, perceptive, and sympathetic book cannot be too highly recommended.

57. "Work and Wage Experience of Willow Run Workers," MONTHLY LABOR REVIEW, LXI (May, 1945), p. 1076. Willow Run was the huge plant Henry Ford built outside of Detroit solely for wartime bomber production. For a description of work in the plant, see Glendon F. Swarthout, WILLOW RUN (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1943). For a discussion of the technical and political problems, see Keith Sward, THE LEGEND OF HENRY FORD (New York: Atheneum, 1968), pp. 429-449.

58. Barnes, "Labor Policies," Chapter 16, p. 26.

59. NEW YORK TIMES, May 1, 1943, p. 1.

60. Barnes, "Labor Policies," Chapter 16, n.p.

61. Irving Howe and B. J. Widick, THE UAW AND WALTER REUTHER (New York: Random House, 1949), pp. 107-125.

62. Don McGill, quoted in LABOR ACTION, April 12, 1942, p. 2.

63. Ben Hall, "Auto Union Faces Very Grave Crisis," LABOR ACTION, September 11, 1944, p. 3.

64. "UAW Acts Up," BUSINESS WEEK, July 4, 1942, p. 88.

65. Michigan Congress of Industrial Organizations, PROCEEDINGS OF THE SIXTH CONVENTION (Flint, Michigan, 1943), pp. 136-137. The UAW had 77 percent of the delegates (965 of 1245) and 86 percent of the votes (4108 of 4726). Detroit and Wayne County UAW delegates alone comprised a majority of both delegates and votes.

66. See any of the three issues of the RANK AND FILER, UAWA, for the full campus program. The Workers Party (WP) had split off from the Socialist Workers Party several years before in a dispute over the political nature of the Soviet Union. The WP described the Second World War as a capitalist war, and thus did not support the war effort.

67. Marty Glaberman, Oral History Interview, UAWA.

68. United Automobile Workers, PROCEEDINGS OF THE NINTH CONVENTION (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1944), p. 247.

69. Approximately 1,200,000 ballots were sent out, and less than 300,000 were returned.

70. Marty Glaberman, Oral History Interview, UAWA.

71. 281,225 auto workers participated in the referendum, while 388,763 participated in the wildcat strikes.

72. The following section is based not on corporate records (with the exception of the Ford Motor Company), but on information drawn from automobile workers and from union records and publications.

73. Baur, personal interview.

74. US Congress, INVESTIGATION, p. 13782.

75. R. J. Thomas, "President's Column," UNITED AUTOMOBILE WORKER, March 1, 1944, p. 4; and "War Strike Will Kill UAW," CIO NEWS, June 5, 1944, p. 5.

76. "UAW-CIO Acts to End Wildcat Strikes," UNITED AUTOMOBILE WORKER, March 1, 1945, p. 2.

77. "The Facts About Ford: UAW Acts to Protect Entire Membership," UNITED AUTOMOBILE WORKER, April 1, 1944, p. 2. See also pp. 8-10 above.

78. "Wildcat Strike Brings Removal of Local Officers," UNITED AUTOMOBILE WORKER, June 1, 1944, p. 1. See also pp. 10-11 above.

79. Letter, John Gibson to Jess Ferrazza, November 8, 1944, Local 212 Papers, UAWA.

80. Letter, Jess Ferrazza to John Gibson, December 5, 1944, Local 212 Papers, UAWA.

81. Albert Gates, "UAW Convention Faces Issue of No-Strike Pledge," LABOR ACTION, August 30, 1943, p. 1.

82. Robert Blauner, ALIENATION AND FREEDOM (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 122.

83. "War Profits 406% Above Peace Rate," CIO NEWS, April 3, 1944, p. 6.

84. "Little Steel Formula No Brake on GM Profit," UNITED AUTOMOBILE WORKER, August 15, 1943, p. 1.

85. Alfred McClung Lee and Norman D. Humphrey, RACE RIOT (New York: Dryden, 1943), p. 6.

86. IBID., see whole book.

87. "Secretary Ades Says," UNITED AUTOMOBILE WORKER, July 15, 1944, p. 7.

88. "Labor Board's Dark Victory," BUSINESS WEEK, June 26, 1943, p. 5.

89. Mangan, "Minority Report," p. 140.

90. "Termination Protest," BUSINESS WEEK, June 3, 1944, p. 102.

91. George Meany, "Strange Omission," AMERICAN FEDERATION-IST, October, 1944, p. 10.

92. Earl Browder, leaflet, UAWA, Nat Ganley Collection. The Communist Parties of Yugoslavia and China managed to fight the fascists within a national united front, while maintaining their independence within that front. This permitted them, unlike most Communist Parties, to take the offensive after the war.

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## Rosie the Riveter: Myths and Realities

*Paddy Quick*

### THE ORIGINAL MYTH

Once upon a time, in the city of Detroit, there lived a woman whose name was Rosie. Rosie was married and had two children, and she did nothing all day except be a housewife. She was very happy.

Then the country she lived in went to war, and the men who worked in the factories had to join the services. The government appealed to women to help out their country and work in the factories, and since Rosie was very patriotic, she left her home and took a job as a riveter. At first Rosie was afraid that she wouldn't be able to do the work because it was "men's work", and she was also afraid that people would think she was unfeminine. But the work turned out to be quite easy, and she found that she could be sexy even in work clothes. So despite the war, she was very happy.

Then the war ended and the men came home and took back

*Opposite: At the Republic Steel plant in Buffalo.*

their factory jobs. Rosie the Riveter (as she had come to be known) went back to being a housewife. Some women wanted to keep their jobs, although these women were mostly neurotic and didn't care about their children. But Rosie was very happy to be able to stop working and be a wife and mother again.

## THE NEW MYTH

Rosie was angry. For years she had wanted to work, but her husband wouldn't let her. It was no use arguing with him, because the government and industry were run by men, and they wanted to keep women at home too. She was oppressed, although she didn't understand exactly how.

Luckily, when the war came, the country needed workers and she was able at last to leave her narrow life behind her and become a full person. She took a job as a riveter and proved to her husband and to everyone else that she was as good as any man. At last she was free! The attitudes of the government and the employers seemed to have changed!

But it was too good to last. Even though everyone had praised her during the war and encouraged her to work, when the war ended the real truth came out! Nothing had changed — the men were as chauvinistic as ever, and even though she fought hard to keep her job, they told her her real place was back in the home. They bombarded her with propaganda about motherhood and the joys of married life. Her husband put his foot down and demanded that she stop trying to wear the pants in the family. Rosie was angry.

But there was nothing she could do about it, and so instead of working she had to sit at home doing nothing. She became neurotic and even took to polishing the dining-room table every day to keep herself occupied. Luckily, many years later, she and other women woke up to their oppression and again went out to work. But that is another story.

It is not easy to discover the truth about women's role in the labor force during and after World War II. While the old version of women's experience in the 1940's has been criticized, the new version is not much better. (1) Both fail to situate women within the capitalist system, and resort to an idealistic account of what determines whether or not

women work for wages. This article will look at not only the actual experience of women in this period, but also the nature of the myths which surround it. This requires an analysis of women's role in production (not only in the wage-labor force but also in the home) and of the ideology to which this gives rise. We must understand not only the errors in the myths but also the source if we are to be able to avoid making similar errors in the future.

## THE EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN THE 1940's

In 1942 28% of women 14 years and older (not including those in school) were in the labor force. By 1945 this percentage had risen to 37%. Yet in 1946 it was down to 31% and by 1950 it had risen to only 32%. (2) On the surface it looks as though the description of women entering the labor force during World War II and leaving at the end of it is accurate. But a closer look at the statistics leads to a different conclusion.

There was still massive unemployment in 1940, while in 1945 unemployment was extremely low. But labor-force participation, as defined by the government, measures only the percentage of people who are either employed or actively looking for work. (Today that means being able to describe to the census taker the methods one has used in the last four weeks to find a job.) Clearly many people, particularly women, will not actively look for work when it seems hopeless to do so. Thus in 1940, many women who would have taken work if it were available were not included in the "labor force". Today the government collects statistics on the "discouraged workers", who, not surprisingly, turn out to consist of women and young people aged 16 to 19 in about equal proportions. We don't have those statistics for 1940, but it is safe to assume that if "discouraged" women workers had been considered in the "labor force", far more than 28% of women would have been in this category, perhaps even as many as 33%. In 1945, on the other hand, when unemployment was extremely low, the labor-force participation rate more accurately reflected the percentage of women who wanted to work for wages. (While some men also drop out of the labor-force statistics in periods of high unem-

ployment, it is presumed that all men not in school and not retired want to work. The same assumption is not made for women.) Thus a large part of the increase in measured labor-force participation of women between 1940 and 1945 can be accounted for by the decrease in unemployment in this period.

Yet there was still a considerable increase in labor-force participation even after allowing for this effect of unemployment. Who were these women, and why did they enter the labor force? One factor is that many of these women had husbands in the services. About 13 million men were demobilized between 1945 and 1947, and many of them were married. During the war, their wives received some money from the government (taken from their husbands' wages), but the amount was small and insufficient to maintain them, especially if they had children. Hence many of these women, who would, if their husbands had been with them, have spent their time taking care of the home, were of necessity in the labor force. The percentage of married women working rose from 15% in 1940 to 24% in 1945, despite a slight increase in the birth rate over this period. (3)

Another factor was the higher wages available to women during the war. A wider range of jobs was available to women during the war. One survey showed that within seven months of Pearl Harbor the number of jobs for which employers were willing to consider women rose from 29% to 55% of the total. (4) A large percentage of these new jobs were in manufacturing, and, compared with the farm, service, and clerical jobs to which women had been overwhelmingly confined before the war, they paid incredibly well. While a female sales clerk could earn only about \$15 a week, women in manufacturing were able to earn around \$25, and those in war plants an average of \$35. (5) Thus not only were there considerable occupational shifts within the female labor force (with farm workers becoming sales workers, sales workers becoming factory workers, etc.), but also many women were attracted out of the home and into the labor force by the higher wages available generally. Women who before the war had stayed at home because \$15 a week could not compensate for leaving their work at home, were willing to take a job which paid \$25.



Thus a large part of the increase in labor-force participation resulted from changes in the situation of women at home and the wages available outside the home. Once this is understood, it is possible to look at the influence of other things such as patriotism and the attitudes towards working women.

How important was patriotism? It is undeniable that many women worked harder during the war, both in and out of the home, than they had ever done before or than they would have considered doing in normal times. Women with full-time household responsibilities took on full-time (44-hour-per-week) jobs. The strain of this work showed up in the rates of absenteeism and job turnover, particularly in the war industries! The rates for women were double those for men, and it was widely known that this was due to the pressure of household responsibilities and fatigue. Yet many women were prepared, for the duration of the war, to accept the hardship involved in literally holding two "full-time" jobs because they felt the need to contribute to the "war effort". (6)

Was there a change in attitudes towards working women? Again, it is hard to quantify such changes as did occur, let alone their effects. Among employers, it was not so much a change of heart that made them willing to employ women in jobs which had been considered "men's jobs" as the unavailability of men for these jobs; refusal to employ women in these jobs would have led to considerable loss of profits. Within the working class, the opposition to married women working came to a great extent from the fear of both men and women that this would take jobs away from male heads of households and thus harm those households (men, women, and children). This fear was, and is, considerably greater in periods of high unemployment such as 1940, than when unemployment is low, as it was during the war. In 1946, a public-opinion survey found that 86% of those surveyed opposed wives working if jobs were scarce and their husbands could support them. Yet when the question was rephrased to eliminate the issue of job scarcity, the opposition dropped to 63%. (7) Yet even this survey underestimates the importance of the issue of unemployment. There was considerable fear of another depression in 1946, and "re-

phrasing the question" could not eliminate this.

The extent to which actual change in attitudes among women and men contributed to the increase in labor-force participation is as uncertain as the effect of "patriotism". What is clear is that a large part of the increase which has been attributed to these factors was due to changes in the objective conditions of women which resulted from the decrease in unemployment, the increase in the number of married men in the services, and the increase in the wages of women. This becomes clearer if we look at what happened after the war.

While the labor-force participation rate for women fell sharply at the end of the war (from 37% in 1945 to 31% in 1946), this must be put in the context of the other changes that took place at the same time. In the first place, although there was a slight increase in unemployment, it seems reasonable to assume that some of the women who were laid off took the opportunity for a welcome break from the strain of work and so, in a technical sense, "dropped out of the labor force". Yet this is a minor factor compared with the rapid change in the family situation of many women.

Between 1945 and 1947, the birth rate increased dramatically: from 86 per 1000 women aged 15 to 44 to 113 per 1000 (an increase of almost a third), as families who had postponed having children during the war took advantage of the relative prosperity and security which seemed to exist. (8) The continuing increase in the birth rate led to an increase in the percentage of women whose care of children kept them busy at home. And even for those women who did not have children immediately after the war, the task of taking care of husbands and homes took an increasing portion of their time. (The return of servicemen not only displaced women from the jobs they had held, but also created work for them in the home!)

Finally, the high wages women had received during the war did not continue. In Baltimore, women's wages fell on average from \$50 a week in 1944 to \$37 in 1946. (9) This, combined with the extra work necessary in the home, wiped out the benefit many women previously derived from holding a job.

Yet these factors are ignored in both of the myths about

"Rosie the Riveter". According to the first myth, the changes in women's labor-force participation can be explained entirely in terms of how women felt about working for wages and how they felt about the war. The second myth is merely a variant on the first myth — whether women held jobs or not depending on how men felt. In both myths, it was a matter of feelings, a matter of choice. This is why both accounts must be rejected and why the actual experience of women in the 1940's must be re-examined. What is missing in the myths is an understanding of the fact that, for the working class as a whole, work, both in and out of the home, is a necessity, and the extent to which that work takes place outside the home is economically determined.

### THE FREEDOM TO WORK

Workers, as Marx pointed out, are free in two senses. They are free to sell themselves in the labor market to anyone who is willing to buy them, and they are free in the sense that they are "unencumbered" by possession of the means of production. It is the separation of workers from the means of production which forces them to work for those who own the means of production, the capitalists. It is not a matter of choice — workers do not have the option of working for themselves, they have to work for the capitalists.

Yet somehow it seems as though women are different. While radicals have accepted the idea that working-class men have to work for wages, the notion lingers that women can choose (or that men can choose for them) whether or not to work for wages. This is the absurd proposition on which both myths rest. It is an absurd proposition because it denies the fundamental reality of capitalist society — it denies that the working class as a whole is forced to spend all of its time working, all of its time creating value, while in return it receives only enough to live and reproduce itself as a class. The difference between what it produces and what it consumes constitutes the profits, the surplus value, which is expropriated by the capitalist class. Even the "spare time" of workers is only sufficient to enable them to recuperate from one day's work in order to be able to work the next day. This is as true for working-class women as for working-class men.

For working-class women, this means that they will work for wages if by doing so they can contribute to the survival of the family better than if they worked at home. How many women currently working for wages could leave their jobs without imposing hardship on the families they are part of? How many women not working for wages could leave their homes and their children without causing hardship to their children? In looking at what determines women's labor-force participation we must start from the assumption that their decisions (or the decisions of both husbands and wives) are based on a rational assessment of what is best for the working-class families of which women are a part.

This is not to deny that an element of choice is involved. Just as a man could give up a job which pays \$200 a week in order to take a job which is more pleasant but which pays only \$180, so a woman could stay at home and take care of her children rather than take a job paying \$80 a week and pay out \$60 a week in day-care expenses. But it is a narrow range of choice. The flexibility, such as it was, did permit many patriotic women to take jobs during World War II — women who, but for the war, would have stayed at home. (This must be distinguished from women taking jobs because they could earn higher wages than before.) But these choices were, and still are, made within a narrow context, the context of capitalist society, in which the over-riding necessity of survival forces both women and men to submit to the dictates of the market.

In order to understand why this "element of choice" has been exaggerated in the myths of "Rosie the Riveter", it will be useful to look at the experience of bourgeois women during the war, i.e. at those women whose income from property or from their husbands' property did not make it necessary for them to work.

## BOURGEOIS WOMEN IN WORLD WAR II

Bourgeois women were patriotic too. Many of them threw themselves into the "war effort" with determination. They worked hard in the volunteer organizations, and some even took "regular" jobs to demonstrate their commitment.

But there was a fundamental difference between these women and the working-class women who also contributed to the "war effort". Bourgeois women took up this work not out of economic necessity but by choice. For them the money they earned was totally unimportant — it could even be nothing, as in volunteer work. Their decisions were based not on the wages they could earn but on how they felt about work, how they thought it would affect their children, how it would affect their relationships with their husbands, and how it would contribute to their own personal development. These were the determining factors in their decisions.

Yet here we can see the origin of the myths. It is not that these factors were unimportant to working-class women, but that they could only come into play in that narrow context within which an element of choice is involved. The myths look only at those factors common to all women and ignore the difference between the situation of working-class women and bourgeois women. They ignore the context within which women make their decisions as to whether to work for wages or not.

Bourgeois ideology masks the existence of class conflict. It does this by focusing attention on the factors common to both the working class and the capitalist class. What gives it its strength is the fact that workers and capitalists do have things in common. "Naderism", for example, recognizes everyone as "consumers". In the case of women, the oppression to which they are subject makes it easy for feminists to focus only on the common oppression of bourgeois and working-class women and ignore the existence of class conflict between the working class and the bourgeoisie.

What gives the myths their strength, and accounts for their popularity, is that they are partly true. But in mistaking the part for the whole, not only is class conflict ignored, but even the "part" is misunderstood. The oppression of women does not result from the "ideas" of men and women on "women's place in society", but from class conflict. Hence the oppression of women cannot be overcome by changes in "attitudes", but can only be overcome by class struggle. Engels argued that the beginnings of the oppression of women coincided with the development of class society. (10) Yet bourgeois feminism, in its more developed

form, sees in the continuing oppression of women in all forms of class society a "proof" of its contention that the conflict between women and men is the basic conflict throughout history. (11) It is thus powerless to explain not only the different forms which that oppression has taken, but also the changes that take place in the form of that oppression with the development of capitalism. (12)

In particular, an analysis which focuses on the attitudes of society towards working women is unable to account for the very real changes in society which led to permanent increases in the participation of women in the wage-labor force both during and after World War II.



#### LONG-RUN TRENDS IN WOMEN'S LABOR-FORCE PARTICIPATION

At the beginning of this article, it was pointed out that 28% of women 14 years and older were recorded as being in the labor force in 1940 (a total of 13.8 million women). This percentage rose to a high point of 37% in 1945, fell back to 30% in 1947, but rose to 32% (a total of 18.1 million women) by 1950. The figure for 1950 would, however, have been considerably higher but for the huge increase in the birth rate between 1945 and 1950. Why did the labor-force participation increase? Why, for example, was there an

increase in the percentage of women with children under six who were working?

To answer this I will look at two seemingly unrelated events that took place in the 1940's. The first is that the percentage of women working as domestic servants not only declined precipitously during World War II, but continued to decline thereafter. (While 72% of black women were employed as domestic servants before the war, by the end of the war the figure was down to 48%.) (13) The second event is that at the end of the war there was a considerable expansion in the production of consumer durables — automobiles, refrigerators, etc. I will argue that these two events are directly related, and that an understanding of this enables us to account for the long-run increase in women's labor-force participation, not only during the 1940's but today.

It is not hard to explain the decline in the number of domestic servants during the war. Black women in particular were able to get jobs which paid considerably higher than domestic service, and the families which had employed them were unable to compete with other employers. But the question I will focus on here is what happened to the work that they had done.

It was not that the work was unnecessary, that the families which employed them were merely indulging in the luxury of "having a servant". Domestic servants worked hard, long hours, cleaning, preparing meals, washing clothes, taking care of children, etc. It would be foolish to imagine that the women in these families took over these tasks unaltered, working the same long hard hours. What happened was somewhat different.

Fresh foods, which take time to prepare, can be replaced by processed foods. Time spent shopping can be saved by greater use of refrigerators and freezers, and by using cars to carry food and household goods purchased in bulk. Time spent washing and ironing clothes by hand can be saved by using washing machines and buying "non-iron" clothes. Time spent cleaning can be saved by replacing wooden counter tops with synthetic, plastic counter tops. Carpets and floors can be vacuumed rather than swept. And, to bring this up to date, children can watch television without constant super-

vision, micro-wave ovens can cook food in minutes rather than hours.

What is initially surprising is not that the number of domestic servants declined during the war, since the "problem" of higher wages for black women could explain a large part of this, but that after the war, when women's wages fell drastically, the number of servants did not go back to its previous level but continued to decline. Yet after the war, the "consumer durables" industry expanded rapidly. Cars, refrigerators, washing machines were purchased by increasing numbers of families, not just by the wealthy families, but by the "middle-income" families as well. During the war, these "luxuries" had helped the bourgeois families "deal with" the vexing problem of the unavailability (at rock-bottom wages) of servants. After the war, they enabled women in working-class families to cope with the "vexing" problem of holding jobs while continuing to take care of their families.

In order to understand the long-run increase in women's labor-force participation, we have to understand the ways in which the capitalist system continually displaces the production of goods for immediate use by those who produce them with the production of goods for exchange, the ways in which people who work for themselves are forced to sell their labor-power to capitalists. The two tendencies are part of the same process, the process of increasing the rate of surplus value — of increasing the difference between what the working class produces and what it needs to survive.

Very schematically, one could say that the working class woman who before the war worked three hours a day producing meals for her family, found herself after the war working one hour producing meals and working two hours in the factory. But in the factory, she produced the processed foods she used for her family's meal in only one hour. What happened to the extra hour? The capitalist got it. The development of processed food, which shortened the time necessary for preparing meals, went not to the woman in the form of an hour of "free time", but to the capitalist in the form of profits.

This is the process which has led, and continues to lead,



to the increasing participation of women in the wage-labor force. More women worked for wages after the war than before, but to see this as "liberation" is to ignore the whole capitalist system and the exploitation of the working class. The working class is exploited when women work in the factories, in the sense that the working class is producing more and more but receiving the same as before in terms of its standard of living. It continues to survive to work another day, another week, another year, but the capitalist class gets more and more of what the working class produces.

Day care is a part of this process. During the war, the government was willing to provide some day-care places — in 1945 government assistance was being given to day-care places for 100,000 children. (14) But this was not "liberation" for the mothers of those children. Government assistance was provided in order to "permit" mothers to work for wages. In other words, the number of women required to work in the day-care facilities was less than the number of women who would otherwise have stayed at home looking after these children. The more enthusiastic capitalists went into raptures over the idea of the number of women who would be "freed" for capitalist production by the institution of day-care facilities. Working-class women were less enthusiastic — the quality of day-care was crucial to them, and the vast majority who had to work preferred to leave their children with relatives or friends rather than entrust them to understaffed day-care centers.

The integration of women into the wage-labor force cannot be seen as the "liberation" of women. Yet it is progressive. Instead of working in the home, relating through their work only to their husbands and children, women found themselves involved in social production, in production which involved co-operation with other workers, in production which developed the unity and strength of the working class as a whole. Women increasingly began to reject the idea that "woman's place is in the home", with all the isolation, including the isolation from the class struggle, which that idea implied. This brings us to a final question: What part did women's consciousness of their oppression play in the increase in their participation in the wage-labor force?

## "WOMAN'S PLACE IS IN THE HOME"

During the 1930's, the "Great Depression", the lack of jobs prevented women from leaving the home, even though the conditions for increasing labor-force participation existed. Women stayed at home. The more fortunate working-class men who had jobs would point to the fact that their wives were not working as evidence of how they had managed to keep their families out of poverty. The most desperate families — the migrant farm workers, for example — couldn't survive unless the women in those families contributed something, however little, to the families' money income. The statement that women's place was in the home was the expression of an ideal, of a goal to be striven for.

But at the same time, it was something more than that. The bourgeois conception of women as weak, fragile, deserving of protection, was echoed in this notion that women's place was in the home. Many working-class men opposed their wives' working. The protection of working-class women had its origin in the protection of the standard of living of the working-class family. Just as the working class as a whole had struggled to restrict child labor, so too it had struggled to restrict the employment of women, in order to allow women to spend their time working for the family. But this struggle of the class as a whole for the restriction of female labor became a struggle for the preservation of the male role in the family and in the labor force. From asserting that they should be allowed to provide for their families without their wives' being forced to work and neglect the children, many working-class men came to assert that they should be allowed to be the only wage worker in the family, even if this meant a lower standard of living of the family as a whole. From being a cry for the "protection of women", the assertion that "woman's place is in the home" became a slogan for the "protection" of men.

The fear that women would take jobs away from men exacerbated this conflict. Both men and women clung to the hope that women would be able to stay at home when the "bad times" were over. But for women, the helplessness of their position — their wish to contribute to their families but their sense that it would be wrong for them to take jobs

— was frustrating. When World War II came, many women went to work almost out of a sense of relief.

They could point to the need for women in the labor force as their "reason" for working. They could both be "patriotic" and contribute to their families. And after the war, many of them did not want to resume their old position. Sometimes people characterize these women as wanting "independence". Yet this is a bourgeois conception. There is no such thing as "independence" for the working class in a capitalist system. What working-class women valued about their jobs was their sense of contributing to their families' well-being and the opportunity their jobs gave them to be with people, to be out of the home, working with other people. It was not the "independence" of working for capitalists which was valuable, but precisely the opposite — the understanding that they were working with others.

In 1946, four-fifths of the women who had been employed in Baltimore in 1944 were still working, including half of the women who had said in 1944 that they planned to quit work at the end of the war. In Baltimore, as in the rest of the country, many women moved from factory to office work. While many women did quit their jobs (to get married, to have children, to recover from overwork and exhaustion), many stayed on. They stayed on for two reasons. The first is that they found that they had to, that the money they earned was necessary for their families (although much of it was spent buying the "consumer durables" to lighten their work load at home). The second reason is that women preferred to work for wages rather than to work at home, even if there was no great difference in the standard of living of their families in the two cases. It would be a mistake to neglect either reason. To ignore the first would be to ignore the increased exploitation involved in women's involvement in the wage-labor force. To ignore the second would be to fail to see what is progressive in this integration of women into the labor force, and into social production in general.

## CONCLUSION

Rosie the Riveter didn't go back to the home, although many of her younger women friends did, as they got mar-

ried and had children. She was far too capable a woman to allow the government or her husband to force her to neglect her family. Maybe she never stopped to think why it was that she was working for a wage while her mother hadn't worked for one, but she certainly never made the mistake of thinking that it was because her mother "didn't feel like working", or that "men were more chauvinist in those days". She would perhaps have liked to have stayed home with her children more, at least until they left school, but she couldn't afford to. The job she had in an office didn't pay as well as her job as a riveter had paid, but it was a job, and she liked some of the people she worked with.

Today Rosie is pretty close to retirement. She knows about N.O.W., but isn't very interested in it. She's more interested in the Coalition of Labor Union Women, since it seems to speak more to her interests. But somehow it doesn't seem to go far enough. Recently someone told her some stories about Rosie the Riveter. She laughed and said that nothing like that ever happened to her.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. The literature on this period tends to fall into one of the two myths. J. E. Trey, "Women in the War Economy", *REVIEW OF RADICAL POLITICAL ECONOMICS*, Vol. IV, No. 3 (July 1972) provides an account of the literature which took the form of the first myth, although her own analysis is basically a form of the second myth — what the experience of women in World War II shows is "the manipulation of the female work force" (p. 40). William A. Chafe, *THE AMERICAN WOMAN* (1972) provides an excellent statistical analysis of the period, but tends to overemphasize the significance of "attitudes". Sheila Tobias and Lisa Anderson, "What Really Happened to Rosie the Riveter" (MSS Modular Publications, Module 9, 1974) attack elements of both myths and provide the best available analysis of the period, although they seem to argue that discrimination led to a decline in labor-force participation after the war.

2. Tobias and Anderson, *OP. CIT.*, p. 7.

3. Chafe, *OP. CIT.*, p. 144.

4. *IBID.*, p. 137.

5. *IBID.*, pp. 143-144. These figures are confirmed by the numerous interviews which students at U. Mass/Boston conducted with women who worked during World War II. I have benefited greatly from these interviews and from the discussions on this subject in my classes on "Women's Work" at U. Mass.

6. The ambiguity in the phrase "full-time job" is clear. The length of the working day has too often been taken to mean the length of time spent in wage-labor. Particularly for working-class women, it is important to take into account the hours of work at home.

7. Chafe, OP. CIT., p. 148.

8. Abbott L. Ferriss, INDICATORS OF TRENDS IN THE STATUS OF AMERICAN WOMEN. This book contains a great quantity of statistics which are useful to any analysis of the position of women in the U.S. in the post-war period.

9. Chafe, OP. CIT., p. 181.

10. Frederick Engels, THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY, PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE STATE.

11. An example of this type of analysis is Elizabeth Gould Davis, THE FIRST SEX. More generally, the analysis takes the form of a description of "patriarchy", which exists alongside of class society.

12. In order to analyze the position of women in capitalist society fully, it would be necessary to distinguish between the capitalist mode of production which is the dominant mode of production in capitalist society and the mode of production within the home in this society.

13. Chafe, OP. CIT., p. 143.

14. This was the maximum number of places funded under the Lanham Act. The intervention of the government in providing child care is significant not because of the quantity of child-care places it provided, but because it was the first such intervention in the United States. See Tobias and Anderson, OP. CIT., pp. 29-31.

15. Chafe, OP. CIT., p. 181.



## Working Women and the War: Four Narratives

*(EDITORS' NOTE: There are very few analytic accounts of the objective or subjective experience of working women in the 1940's. However, there are numerous first-hand narratives written by women about those years. We are printing excerpts from four of those narratives.*

*AUGUSTA CLAWSON was a federal employee who went to work in an Oregon shipyard. In SHIPYARD DIARY OF A WOMAN WELDER, she wrote about her experiences in order to encourage other women to enlist. KATHERINE ARCHIBALD, an academic sociologist, came to the Moore Dry Dock Company in Oakland, California to work in the shipyards and study the effect of the war on women, blacks and chicanos. She remained on the job for two years, working as a storekeeper on the hulls, expediter of materials and warehouse clerk, and later wrote about her experiences in WARTIME SHIPYARD, A STUDY IN SOCIAL DISUNITY.*

*Opposite: Women Shipbuilders, Boston Navy Yard, by Calvin Burnett.*

*MARY SONNENBERG lives in Tracy, California and teaches an adult education class on women in a sexist society. ANNE STEIN has been an activist and organizer all her life. From her work as the "chairman" of Organization for the Women's Trade Union League of Washington in the 1930's, she became the Industrial Union Council, CIO's representative on the OPA Price Panel during World War II and then the head of the Washington Committee for Consumer Protection after the war. She has since been involved in civil rights, struggles for quality desegregated education in New York City public schools, and the Puerto Rican Solidarity Committee.)*

## SHIPYARD DIARY OF A WOMAN WELDER

*Augusta Clawson*

Back to work and more welding. I "dis-improved" as rapidly after lunch as I had improved during the morning. One girl stopped to ask "How you doin'?" and watched me critically. "Here, let me show you, you're holding it too far away." So she took over, but she couldn't maintain the arc at all. She got up disgusted, said "I can't do it — my hand shakes so since I been sick," and I took over again. But she was right. I held it closer and welded on and on and on....

The Big Swede is a real pal. She had not forgotten the patch for my overall trouser leg. She had cut a piece from an old pair of her husband's, scrubbed it to get the oil out, and brought it to me with a needle stuck in the center and a coil of black thread ready for action. "Here," she said, "I knew you wouldn't have things ready in a hotel room. Now you mend that hole before you catch your foot in it and fall."

I talked with Joanne, a very attractive brunette who had previously been a waitress in Atlantic City. She came West when her husband came on for a job. She, like the other waitresses, preferred welding because you "don't have to take so much from the public."





The redheaded mother of seven was terribly upset. Her boy got his papers yesterday, and she hadn't slept all night. First thing this morning she had to take her test and was as jittery as could be. I wonder if this is the sort of thing that people glibly call "the emotional instability of women" without investigating first to find its cause! A mother has a right to be at less than her calmest when her eldest son is leaving to join the Army. But this woman, in the midst of all her worry, had room for concern about me. She came running up. "Say, my eldest boy leaves tomorrow. You can come and live with us if you like." I hesitated, reflecting that it would be difficult to record my daily impressions without risking her suspicion that I might have an ulterior motive for taking this job. So I temporized. "You're a brick to suggest it, but you can't spare a room for me when you still have six children in the house." She looked puzzled. "A room?" she said. "Why, I don't know — maybe I could fix you up a room." Then she shrugged her bewilderment away. "No, I mean just come and live with us." That's what I call hospitality.

I, who hate heights, climbed stair after stair after stair, till I thought I must be close to the sun. I stopped on the top deck. I, who hate confined spaces, went through narrow corridors, stumbling my way over rubber-coated leads — dozens of them, scores of them, even hundreds of them. I went into a room about four feet by ten where two shipfitters, a shipfitter's helper, a chipper, and I all worked. I welded in the poop deck lying on the floor while another welder spattered sparks from the ceiling and chippers like giant woodpeckers shattered our eardrums. I, who've taken welding, and have sat at a bench welding flat and vertical plates, was told to weld braces along a baseboard below a door opening. On these a heavy steel door was braced while it was hung to a fine degree of accuracy. I welded more braces along the side, and along the top. I did overhead welding, horizontal, flat, vertical. I welded around curved hinges which were placed so close to the side wall that I had to bend my rod in a curve to get in. I made some good welds and some frightful ones. But now a door in the poop deck of an oil tanker is hanging, four feet by six of solid steel, by my welds. Pretty exciting!

The men in the poop deck were nice to me. The shipfitter was toothless. The grinder had palsy, I guess, for his hands shook pitifully and yet he managed to handle that thirty-pound grinder. The welder was doing "pick-up" work which meant touching up spots that had been missed. An inspector came through and marked places to chip, and the ship's superintendent stopped and woke the shipfitter's helper.

Then I went down more stairs, and still more, and finally crawled through a square hole in the floor and down a narrow ladder held by the shipfitter below and emerged into a little two-by-twice room....

There is nothing in the training to prepare you for the excruciating noise you get down in the ship. Any who were not heart-and-soul determined to stick it out would fade out right away. Any whose nerves were too sensitive couldn't take it, and I really mean couldn't. There are times when those chippers get going and two shipfitters on opposite sides of a metal wall swing tremendous metal sledge-hammers simultaneously, and you wonder if your ears can stand it. Sometimes the din will seem to swell and engulf you like

a treacherous wave in surf-bathing, and you feel as if you were going under. Once I thought to myself, "If this keeps on, I wonder —" It makes you want to scream wildly. And then it struck me funny to realize that a scream wouldn't even be heard! So I screamed, loud and lustily, and couldn't even hear myself. It was weird. So then I proceeded to sing at the top of my lungs (I'm discreet usually, for my pitch is none too good), and I couldn't hear the smallest peep. It's an ill wind that blows nobody good, and I decided to make the most of it, so I hauled out my entire seafaring repertoire and sang "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep," "Anchors Aweigh, My Boys," and "The Landlubbers Lie Down Below."

....

And it isn't only your muscles that must harden. It's your nerve, too. I admit quite frankly that I was scared pink when I had to climb on top deck today. It's as if you had to climb from the edge of the fifth story up the sixth of a house whose outside walls have not been put on. Even the scaffolding around the side is not very reassuring, for there are gaps between, where you are sure you'll fall through. The men know their muscles are strong enough to pull them up if they get a firm grip on a bar above. But we women do not yet trust our strength, and some of us do not like heights. But one does what one has to. And it's surprising what one can do when it's necessary.

I arrived on the top deck, shivering in the moist blasts while I waited till the shipfitters were ready for me to tack. I sat down to get out of the breeze, but cold steel is very cold to sit on or lean back against. It was almost warmer standing in the wind, especially since the steel was wet as well as cold. So I stood and waited, and thought about having to go down again. Talk about panic in anticipation! I understood exactly how the girl felt who got up in a crane and was so scared she froze there and they had all sorts of trouble getting her down. I felt that "come Hell and high water and lunch and dismissal time" I'd rather just stay there the rest of my days than climb down.

.... At about 10:00 most of the men went below to work, while I waited to be called. The call arrived: "Come below to tack." I went to the side to start down. I wasn't sure how or if I'd make it. And just then Frank's friendly smile ap-

peared around the side, and — "O.K.? Give me your hood." I handed it over the edge and tried not to see the precipice below. Then I began edging down like an inchworm. He asked, "O.K.?" again, and I grinned and said, "I'm not awfully sure how to make my entrance, but I'm on my way."

Anyway I managed to get loose from the "fifth floor" and start down the partial side wall of the "fourth floor". Frank suggested that I come down one part of the wall rather than the other as the supports were less shaky. So within less time than it has taken to write it I was down, and was given an overhead to tack. What a reward! I am not yet any good at all on overhead.

In the meantime the safety man came on our ship, and ladders and hand rails were ordered. I went up a ladder to top deck and soldered the braces on the deck for the hand rails. When I had to solder one about six inches from the edge, I quite shamelessly crawled the last two feet, instead of walking nonchalantly over to it. And from then on the day was the best one yet. I felt better surrounded by railings. My welds were all right. I split my apple with a nice shipwright, Frank Raleigh. There was a grand feeling of all working together. Frank would explain things of interest and seemed glad to answer my questions.

The sun came through the clouds and I looked down at the Yard. The same Yard that had seemed so confused my first day was now not at all chaotic. It had all the order of well-arranged shelves in a grocery shop. Staples such as decks were in one place; tanks in another. Whirlies, like grocer boys, delivered and placed whatever goods were ordered. A 30-ton concrete block was swung onto our top deck to drop the steel into place. Oh, we have all the conveniences. There was not even confusion among the hundreds of persons I could see in the Yard. I could identify a shipfitter on the next ship by the work he was doing. I knew what sort of tacking a neighbor welder was doing, and I could see shipwrights lining up deck plates while nearby riggers directed the "landing" of a bank of welding machines which swung in mid-air from the pulley of a "whirly." It all makes sense now.

## WOMEN IN THE SHIPYARD

*Katherine Archibald*

In shipyard relationships, the difficulty, of which I was earliest aware pertained neither to scorn of a people nor to affirmation of the fixed and wholesale inferiority of a class. I was first aroused from my vision of equalitarianism by the need to defend, against the resentment of the masculine majority, my personal right as a woman to be where I had chosen to come. The background of such resentment is, of course, well known and well documented, but its manifestations in the shipyard were so strong as to force my consideration of it as a permanent problem.

Before the war, most heavy industries, especially ship construction, had provided one of the few occupational areas upon which the pressure of feminism had been exerted in vain. They were protected by the comfortable conviction that the work was so complex and arduous as to remain forever beyond the weaker grasp of womankind. And then December 7th struck, and the needs of war became paramount over all conviction. A typical pattern was established at Moore Dry Dock. Here, women were beginning to intrude into the actual work of construction by the late spring of 1942, first as welders, then as laborers and electricians, and finally, a growing stream, into almost all the crafts of ship-building.

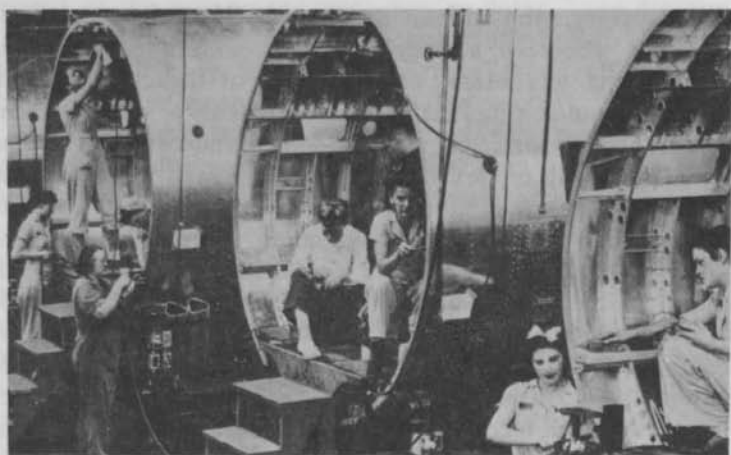
For their work at welding plates, the women were put at first in open sheds "where everybody could keep an eye on them." Not until the fall were they permitted on the hulls as workers, and even then they were stationed only on the top decks. But as astonishment lessened and an occasional whistle took the place of the gawking stare, the

limitations upon the usefulness of women were more and more withdrawn, and by spring of 1943 women had obviously become a stable and inevitable factor in the company of the wartime shipyard. By summer, the period of peak employment, women comprised approximately twenty percent of the total working force of more than thirty-five thousand, and that percentage was maintained into the late months of 1944.

In their ordinary relationships with women workers most of the men were courteous and even gallant. As the women infiltrated the hulls and the remoter shacks of the yard, the men amiably removed their galleries of nudes and pornography from the walls and retired them to the gloom of the tool box. In deference to the presence of "ladies," manners were improved, faces were shaved more often, and language was toned down. The taboo against improprieties of speech within earshot of women was so extreme as to be amusing, particularly since the women themselves frequently gave audible proof that the forbidden words were neither unfamiliar nor disturbing to them. Yet I have often seen men who wanted to use strong language, and with good excuse for it, flush with sudden embarrassment and drop their voices to a mutter on becoming conscious of a feminine audience....But underneath the formality and politeness a half-concealed resentment still persisted... In the bull session, the passing insult, and the occasional public expression of opinion the coals of this antagonism would leap to flame.

In large part, however, masculine antagonism constituted a vague and emotion-charged atmosphere rather than any well-defined and rational position. It was somewhat deviously manifested in the emphasis in shipyard talk and behavior upon the sexual role of women....

In the shipyards, rumor was continually busy with suspicions and reports of salacious activities in the obscurer parts of the ships or in some vaguely identified warehouse. Like evil-smelling breezes, tales of scandal idly floated from group to group: of a stolen kiss or an amusing infatuation; even of the ultimate sin, with or without price, in the fantastic discomfort of the double bottoms. One persistent report concerned the activities of enterprising pro-



fessionals for whom a shipyard job was said merely to provide an opportunity for pursuit of a yet more lucrative career. The end result of all such talk, of course, was to deny the possibility of the establishment of businesslike relationships between men and women on the job and to discredit women as effective workers. For women, as the unwelcome intruders, were taxed with all the many and varied disruptions, in the routines of workmanship, that were chargeable against sexual interests and activities. Thus, on my first day of work in the yards I was warned by the superintendent of my craft that any flirting with the men in the yards would result in dire consequences for me. "Remember what I told you," he called after me as I left his office; "give a man an inch and he'll take a mile, and if there's any funny business on the job, it'll be you who goes out like a light."

The management issued strict rules to govern the dress of shipyard women—rules based fully as much on the principles of concealment and sexless propriety as on the purported aims of safety. Women guards stalked vigilantly through the warehouses, the workshops, and the rest rooms, looking for the coy curl unconfined by a bandanna, the bejeweled hand, and the revealing sweater. Slip-on sweaters were not to be worn except when modestly covered by a shirt or outer jacket. Hardly out of pure regard

for propriety, the women themselves formed an undepu-  
tized but effective agency for enforcement of the rules  
of rude and graceless dress. Shorn of their adornment,  
they were quick to pluck others' plumes. A woman of my  
acquaintance whose job was sedentary and relatively clean  
came in a suit to her first day of shipyard work, but she  
needed only one session with the girls of the rest room to  
convince her that she had best come the second morning  
in her husband's overalls. In the meantime, of course, the  
women in the offices at the front of the yard — the typists,  
the bookkeepers, and the private secretaries — bobbed  
about in their sweaters and knee-high skirts or swished  
through the corridors in their svelte and elegant black  
dresses without arousing any special comment or causing  
more than a flutter of disturbance in the routine of work.  
For it was the change, the element of strangeness, that  
fostered anxiety over the proper dress of women in the  
industrial jobs. Like soldiers infiltrating enemy lines, wo-  
men in the shipyards had to be camouflaged lest the dif-  
ference in sex be unduly noted and emphasized....

The reluctance of the unions to permit full participation  
by women was only the token of the reluctance that was  
felt, and often spoken, by almost every masculine member.  
It was not explained by reference to any selfish desire to  
protect a vested interest from further sharing. The prin-  
cipal and most common explanation was that the work was  
unsuitable for women, who, being less vigorous and less  
reliable than men, were not able to learn and perform the  
skills of a trade with the same efficiency. Countless anec-  
dotes proved — to the satisfaction of the already preju-  
diced — that women were hopelessly inept with tools and  
machinery and were altogether out of place in what had  
always been the appointed labor of men. One crusty pipe-  
fitter exploded when he learned of a certain woman's ad-  
vancement to journeyman's status. "That big fat slob a  
pipefitter!" he finally managed to say. "Why, she waddles  
like a duck, and she handles a wrench like a powder puff.  
I'd throw a kid helper right off my gang if he couldn't fit  
a joint better and faster than she'll ever know how to do."

The men seldom credited the women with the capacity  
or the desire to put in an honest day's work. "Take a look



around at the women and what they're doing," one disgruntled workman urged. "From one end of the hull to the other they're jawing or prettying up their faces or bothering some man and keeping him from his work...."

The bitter cup of these malcontents was made yet more unpalatable: for doing less than a man's work — much less, in their opinion — the women nonetheless received a man's full pay. It was a conviction almost universal among the men that if women had to be introduced into the industry for lack of desirable males, it should only be as inferiors whose wages were in accord with their capacities. I found no man who would accept as valid the argument that the security of the standard wage would be threatened if women were customarily paid less for doing the same type, if not always the same quality or quantity, of work as the men, since to employers the greater skill of the man might frequently be out-weighed by the woman's smaller wage. Against the concrete wall of masculine assurance that no employer could ever prefer a woman, even at half the wage, the argument was about as penetrating as birdshot.

Woman's claim to the good working conditions of the shipyard was likewise attacked as inherently unjust. The good wages and hours were the product of long, arduous, and sometimes bloody struggles by men. Women had played no part in the organized effort by which the struggle had been won, and were assumed not to understand the principles involved; they were thought to be passively disinterested at best, and often actively unsympathetic. The union-conscious worker looked with jaundiced eye upon both their presence in a highly organized industry and their nominal membership in the respectable unions of the crafts. Like an unassimilated minority within a threatened nation, women, he feared, might prove a grave source of weakness in the event of attack by an external enemy.

This skepticism was especially strong in a skilled craftsman, long active in union affairs of the Bay Area, with whom I had many heated discussions on the subject. "Women don't know how to be loyal to a union," he asserted. "They're born, and they grow up, dirty dealers. There isn't a straight one among 'em." To illustrate his conten-

tion he recounted his unhappy experience, in the depression, at attempting to organize the clerks of a local dime store. "I slaved for those girls," he declared, "and after I'd helped get them the wage boost they wanted, they wouldn't look at me for dirt. When I'd done for them all I'd done, and they told me, with my cards right there ready to be signed, that their boss was a nice fellow and they couldn't hurt his feelings by joining a lousy union, well, I felt like pasting one of 'em square on the jaw."

Entering into every established craft as helpers only, women faced peculiar and discriminatory difficulties in advancing to a higher status. So far as came to my knowledge, women at Moore Dry Dock did not pass beyond the status of journeyman to the supervisory position of leaderman or quarterman except in the despised craft of the general laborer. Further advancement was blocked by the refusal of men to work under a woman's direction. As a general policy, indeed, women were not advanced to journeyman unless it were possible to provide enough women helpers to accomplish the necessary labor without the aid of a man's greater strength. I soon learned what difficulties awaited a woman given authority over shipyard men. Assigned to a warehouse staffed mainly by older workers on the downgrade, I was presently advanced to a position of slightly increased responsibility and better pay. The protest of those who were passed by was immediate and sharp. The boss was hounded with complaints, and I was a target for sour glances and surly remarks. One disgusted fellow replied to my request for help in moving a three-hundred-pound box of pipe fittings with the brusque comment, "If you get a man's pay, I guess you can do a man's work for it." Weeks of time, every device of tact, and feminine sweetness were required to return the atmosphere to its normal calm.

Women were frequently shifted from boss to boss, finding a permanent place at last only on a job so routine or unpleasant as not to attract the more favored men. In any period of slowdown or changeover, discriminatory layoffs were likely to be made, and in the winter of 1943, after an important and labor-demanding contract had been completed at Moore Dry Dock, a large group of women electricians

were forced to accept either a release or a pay reduction — from the amount to which their seniority had entitled them to the basic helper's wage. A year later, disproportionate quitting and layoffs of the women were clearly to be seen in the statistics of employment for the entire shipyard. By February, 1945, women working in the crafts at Moore Dry Dock constituted less than ten percent of the total personnel. Only thirteen hundred yet remained of the seven thousand who had filled the yards with femininity during the period of peak employment a year and a half before. Masculine hopes for total exclusion of the intruding group were well on the way to fulfillment....

## TWO EPISODES

*Mary Sonnenberg*

When my daughter was a little girl, she used to say to me, "Tell me about your world." Here is a little piece of it.

I had just returned to Newark, having spent nine months in California with my husband, prior to his going overseas. He would spend thirty months in the CBI Theater (China, Burma, India) before I would see him again. My time with him in California had an unreal, impermanent quality about it. We never knew when he would get his orders, or where he would be going. In fact, we went through several heart-rending farewells before he actually left. The time we had together was precious. We both fell in love with California and vowed to come back when the war was over.

His departure came as a relief for both of us. We were emotionally drained by that time, but we both felt that the sooner he left, the sooner he would be back. Fascism had to be defeated, then we could pick up our lives again. This

feeling was by no means unique to us. It was pervasive throughout the politics and culture of that period.

I had felt rather defensive about spending all that time in California doing nothing to help the war effort. The Army needed nurses and here I was, depriving our soldiers of my skills. But at that time, the Army policy was to separate husbands and wives who were both in the service. We were afraid that when the war was over, we would end up in different parts of the world. Sometime during the war the policy was changed, but by that time I was back in Newark, into "industrial nursing." I was helping the war effort by working in a defense plant.

The Sigmund Eisner firm made G.I. khaki pants, ponchos and raincoats. The factory was housed in a huge old barn-like structure in a rather run-down section of Newark. In those days, we called it a slum. Today, it is a black ghetto. I think the building dated back to post Civil War days. It was a drafty, dirty fire trap. About two hundred women and about twenty men worked there, doing their bit for the war effort. A flag signifying that it was a defense plant flew above the building, along with the American flag.

The cutters form the aristocracy of the garment industry. They plied their skills on the first floor. One could see then unrolling huge bolts of cloth on long tables, layers and layers of cloth, then using power cutting instruments to cut out the various pattern parts. They were all white men, mostly middle-aged. The few younger men were either 4F or deferred from Army service because their skills were considered essential to the war effort.

The second, third and fourth floors were filled with rows of power sewing machines. The din of the machines was deafening. One could see row upon row of black and white women bending over the machines, surrounded by bundles of material stacked high on both sides of them. For the black women, this was their first entry into the ranks of skilled labor. The majority of the white women were of Italian descent. There were a few Jewish women; one, an older woman, was a refugee from Nazi Germany.

A master switch controlled the power. During the lunch period, when the power was off, the factory was strangely silent. Then you realized how you had been shouting over

the din. The women would sit at their silent machines and eat their lunch from brown paper bags. Then the odors from the Italian Hero or Submarine sandwiches would mingle with the odors given off by the woolen cloth and the synthetic rubberized raincoat and poncho material. The ventilation was poor, and on hot or rainy days the air would become really foul.

I had very little to do as far as industrial nursing was concerned. (The employment of an R.N. may have been a condition for obtaining an Army contract.) An accident might consist of a broken needle in a woman's finger (those power machines were fast and wicked), or a woman might pass out from heat exhaustion. My office consisted of a little cubicle on the second floor. I gradually worked out a routine for myself to end the sheer boredom of my inactivity.

After "punching in" (this was the first time I had ever worked a forty-hour week with time and a half for overtime), I repaired to my office to read the N.Y. Times from cover to cover. I would then clip salient articles to send to my husband in the Burmese jungle. Then I would make "rounds". I would start on the fourth floor, stop at every machine to speak to the women, and gradually work my way down. This took most of the morning. During the afternoon, I would write to my husband. Several times during the day I would go down and step out into the street for a cigarette, only to be joined by Mr. Jackson with his inevitable cigar.

Mr. Jackson was a boss in name only, a relative placed there by the real powers in the Red Bank. We all knew he had very little authority, and very little knowledge of what was actually going on in the factory. But we all played the game with him. He loved to talk to me about San Francisco. He was an old bachelor who had an eye for "the ladies." My manner was friendly but reserved. Although he called all the "office girls" by their first names, he didn't quite dare to do this with me. So he settled on Miss Mary. He disgusted me.

Most of the workers in the factory did piece work. This meant that the more they produced, the higher the pay check. Speed was of the essence. Another smaller group got hourly pay. They trimmed threads, corrected errors, folded garments, etc. They were mostly older women and

their pay checks were small in comparison to the pieceworkers.

The women at the machines worked all day sewing on pockets, or collars, or set in sleeves, or marked button-holes. You sat at the same machine and did the same operation all day long. The more complicated the operation, the more skill and time involved, the more the operation was worth, according to the prevailing contract price list. The foreman or forelady saw to it that the bundles were moved from worker to worker in a complicated series of progressions, to the eventually finished garment. No one wanted to be kept waiting for work. Sometimes the foreman would stand over a woman and hurry her because the next worker was waiting. This made for much tension and hostility. Frequently the workers would complain that they didn't "make out" last week because others were too slow. (The term "make out" had a different connotation then.)

There were many absentees. If the women felt that they had "made out" during the previous week, they would frequently just not show up or call in sick. The grind of piece work is devastating physically and mentally. The women consumed huge amounts of aspirin and Alka Seltzer. The foreman on the third floor was a volatile, hard-working, harassed man, Looey Caruso. He would rant and rage at the delays when so many of the women were out, ostensibly sick. "Everybody gets sick, but nobody dies," he would shout to the world. The phrase became kind of an in joke.

The plant was organized under the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. The shop steward, Helen Grandi, occupied two, or perhaps I should say three, unique posts simultaneously. That is, officially, she was both shop steward (union representative) and forelady. Unofficially, she was the mistress of the production manager, Mr. Condino. When I questioned the workers about this obvious conflict of interest, the workers shrugged at my naivete. That's just how it was. They didn't expect much from Helen or from the union. The fact that Helen had a husband, and Mr. Condino had a wife, made the situation titillating. Gossip was rampant about the two. I think the workers were able to exert a subtle pressure on Helen because they knew, and she knew that they knew. This knowledge also reduced Mr.

Condino's stature as the big production boss. They had something on him. The deference they gave him had a mocking quality about it. They enjoyed playing the game.

When new government contracts were negotiated, there was an air of excitement in the factory. There would be nothing new about the work. A new contract merely meant that a certain number of garments had been completed — perhaps in a couple of months — and now a new batch would begin. That meant that all the prices for the various operations would be reviewed, and probably lowered. People started to worry about being able to "make out" under the new contract. The management experts would come down from the main office in Red Bank, and the union experts would come in from New York. They would sit down and do the operations and time them. Invariably, the management experts worked faster. A series of lower prices would be set. The union representative would argue. A compromise would be reached. The workers were then informed about the new price scale. However, the more experienced workers were pretty hip. They had been doing these same operations for so long, they could virtually do them with their eyes closed. So they made out quite well financially. The inexperienced workers were under more pressure from the speedup.

I grew to know the people in the factory, the operations, the prices, and the progression of the bundles from the cutters to the finished product. I also became an authority on real Sicilian pizza and home-made Italian sausage. The people were willing to stop working for a moment or two to chat with me, to explain what they were doing, and to show me how to do it if I wanted to take a stab at it. That's when I found out that a power machine in a factory is quite different from a home sewing machine. I got to know most of them by name. We talked about the war, we exchanged news about our men at the front, we gossiped about Helen and Mr. Condino; in short, the interaction was pleasant. If I came up a little later than usual, they wanted to know what kept me. It was a nice feeling.

There was one hold-out, a slight, thin young black man, Willis Williams. He worked at a steam press. All day long, he would slide pants on and off this narrow press, pressing

open the four seams on each pair of pants. The work was hot and tedious. Willis never spoke to me. He made it obvious that he wanted no part of my cheery presence. (I must have been insufferable.) Still, I persisted. I couldn't understand his hostility.

It took a long time, but gradually Willis and I got to be friends. Not only did we exchange "Good Morning" greetings, but we started talking to each other, both at his machine and in my office. We would have long political discussions about the war. He was awaiting his call from the Draft Board, and he emphatically did not want to go. I was shocked. "But, Willis, we have to fight fascism. I know we have discriminated against Negroes, and that Negroes are oppressed and repressed. (We did not use the term black then.) It is necessary to fight that discrimination and oppression, but we must eliminate fascism abroad first, then we can fight against it at home. If we lose the big battle, then yours is lost, too. So this war must be won first." And so on.

But Willis wasn't buying it. He said he would like to see the blood of white people flowing in the streets of Newark. (Many years later, blood would flow in the streets of Newark, but it would be the blood of black people.) Willis filled me in on the life of black people; how young blacks were harassed in the streets of Newark by the police; how he never knew when he went out in the morning whether or not he would come back in the evening. The prospect of being arrested on the street or even at home was a reality of daily life for Willis. He was a soft-spoken, gentle man. I thought I knew so much. I was so politically aware. I didn't know anything, but I learned.

"Why should I fight a war for white people who have lynched me, burned me, kept me a slave, then kept me in my place, denied me a decent living, denied me my manhood? Yes, I would like to see the Japanese win this war." (As I write this, I remember a large banner carried by blacks during an anti-war protest in the middle 60's. The legend read, "The Viet-Cong never called me nigger.")

I have summarized these conversations which took place over many weeks, but the gist of our respective positions regarding the war is still clear in my mind. I kept trying



to convince him, to turn him around. I thought he had such a fine mind. I wanted him to accept the validity of my position, the correct position. But it was hard, particularly after an incident on a troop train in the South. A troop train carrying German POW's stopped in a southern town to pick up food. The POW's occupied the Pullman dining cars. They were fed first, by black waiters. The G.I.'s on the train, all black, had to wait until the white POW's were fed. Then the black G.I.'s had their dinner, in segregated cars. They ate cold field rations. The incident caused a minor scandal for a day or two.

How could I defend such an incident to Willis? Of course, I could not and did not. Still, I went back to my argument about doing the big job first (fighting fascism, that is), because I really believed it. Willis had been born in Newark. He had a fear of being stationed in the South — and rightly so. Northern blacks were usually sent to places like Texas or Mississippi. This wasn't the usual Army foul-up. It seemed part of Army policy. Willis was afraid that he would be unable to submit to Southern mores for blacks. How could he survive in such an atmosphere? I was unable to respond.

Nevertheless, our discussions continued. He was never angry with me. As I look back, it seems that I gave him ample cause. He told me that this was the first time in his life that he had ever allowed himself to speak freely to a white person. We discussed music, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, slavery, reconstruction, the Black Renaissance of the 20's, and more and more. I had Billie Holiday's recording of "Strange Fruit," a deeply moving comment on lynching. I told him I would bring it to the factory and play it over the music system they had going there. He said he didn't believe that he would ever hear Lady Day singing "Strange Fruit" at Sigmund Eisner's. Well, he did. I think he and I were the only ones who heard it over the noise. Or maybe he and I were the only ones who knew or cared about "Strange Fruit."

While my friendship with Willis continued, I would get occasional flack from the forelady. She would pop into my office when Willis and I would be engrossed in a discussion, and say coyly, "Nurse, I'm going to have to write to your

husband and tell him how much time Willis spends in your office."

Willis was engaged to be married. He invited me to the wedding. He also invited my sister, so that I wouldn't feel strange being the only white person there. I was honored.

My sister and I went to the wedding. Only one other person from the factory was there, a black woman. The reception after the wedding was great. Everyone was gay (happy), enjoying the liquor, music and dancing. Willis introduced us all around. His bride was a lovely young woman. I had a marvelous time. It was the first time that I had danced with a black man. It was an exciting, heady experience. Then they all decided to go to New York — to Harlem — to continue the dancing at the Savoy Ballroom. I was scared, but high, and I wanted to go. I was having a wonderful time and I didn't want the evening to end. My sister pulled me back, and I reluctantly went home.

The next working day at the factory, the black young women were quite cool to me. They had heard about the wedding. They resented the fact that Willis had invited only two people from the factory. That was bad enough, but the fact that he had invited me, a white woman, was a bitter pill for them to swallow. I had an uncomfortable few weeks following that wedding. First the forelady, then the black women; it was too much.

Finally, Willis got his draft notice. Everybody chipped in for a gift, and he was on his way. I got a letter from him some weeks later. "Dear Nurse." (He never would call me by my first name.) He was stationed in Texas. I never heard from him again.

The place just wasn't the same after that, but I continued my daily routine. There were ten or twelve office girls (women) working in the factory, several on the first floor, and two each on the other floors. I would also visit with them during my "rounds." Their work was rather routine, keeping track of the number of completed bundles per worker, etc. The girls in the front office on the first floor operated the switchboard, checked the time cards, typed letters, and so on. Nobody was terribly busy because all the important work was done in Red Bank.

The office workers considered themselves a cut above the factory workers. There was very little mingling between

the two groups. Furthermore, the office workers' salaries were substantially lower than the factory workers' pay checks. This was a constant source of annoyance, a real irritant to the office workers. We had many discussions about these inequities. I pointed out that the factory workers had some protection through their union. The office girls were not in the union and didn't want any part of it; first, because they felt it was corrupt, and second, because they couldn't conceive of themselves as being in the same organization with the factory "help."

Anyway, I told them that all unions were not alike, and that the UOPWA (United Office and Professional Workers of America) was a democratic union of office and professional workers, quite different from the Amalgamated Clothing Workers they all knew and despised. They were interested in the possibility, but they were really not all that anxious. I pointed out that if they made a decision, it should be unanimous, because the group was small. If they weren't together, they could be fired, picked off. So it had to be all or none, the way I saw it. That was where the matter rested for a long time. They continued their griping, but I no longer mentioned the UOPWA. If they wanted to be so pig-headed, why let them.

One day, something happened that really shook them up, something really intolerable, I don't remember just what it was, but they all decided that they were ready to sign up with the UOPWA. We all went down to the union office and signed membership cards. Everybody felt good. We started thinking about demands, pay hours, etc. A feeling of euphoria came over us.

Somehow, the bosses sensed something in the air. There were lots of calls between Newark and Red Bank. Even Mr. Jackson was stirred out of his lethargy. But we didn't care. We were in a pretty good position to know what was going on, because the girls would listen in on all the conversations between Newark and Red Bank. It was all very exciting. We felt like conspirators who were one-up on the opposition.

Then the roof fell in on us. The bosses in Red Bank signed a new union contract with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers which covered all the employees in the factory, includ-

ing the office workers! The girls were then informed that they were members of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union. We felt betrayed. I was unable to accept the fait accompli. I dashed out to a phone booth to call the president of the Amalgamated. I think it was Jacob Potofsky. He was a big name, but I was so furious I didn't care. I don't know how I ever got connected, but I did. I was almost hysterical. I took him to task about the underhanded and undemocratic manner in which his union had simply engulfed those few office workers. What did he need them for? He just wanted to save Sigmund Eisner the nuisance and possible expense of having the UOPWA in the plant. What kind of a union was it that collaborated with the bosses against the workers. I don't remember what he said, or if indeed he said anything. The next thing I did was to call a friend who was active in the trade-union movement. "Look what they did," I said. "The Amalgamated sold out the UOPWA and those few office girls. What the hell kind of a union movement is that?" I may have cried. I know I felt like it.

He told me that I would have to accept the fact that all unions weren't perfect, that many of them were undemocratic, and that many of them collaborated with management. On balance, however, the workers were still better off with unions. He asked me to imagine the plight of workers if there were no unions. The thing to do was to struggle to make unions more democratic, etc., etc. He was very sympathetic and understanding. He agreed with me that the girls had gotten a raw deal out of the whole situation. I told him to take his union movement and shove it.

It was hard to face the reproachful glances of the office girls after that. But I think they accepted the situation with better grace than I did. I still had to struggle with my ambivalent feelings about the trade-union movement. It took a while. I finally came around to my friend's way of facing certain realities of trade-unionism. I had lost my innocence.

The war seemed to drag on interminably. My husband had been overseas for quite some time now. It was a lonely kind of life for all of us. My morale reached an all-time low. What was I doing at Sigmund Eisner anyway? Win the war in a garment factory? What a farce! I resolved to join the Army Nurse Corps, and I wrote my husband to tell

him about my future plans. He knew all about my experiences at Sigmund Eisner's. I had kept him informed about my world, along with the New York Times clippings. He wrote back immediately and implored me not to join the Army Nurse Corps. "Get yourself another job," he said. Well, that's what I did. I left Sigmund Eisner's and took a job with the Visiting Nurse Association. But that's another story.

On Friday, May 24, 1974, Duke Ellington died. Here is a paragraph from his obituary in the S.F. Chronicle:

In 1943 at New York's Carnegie Hall, Ellington conducted the premiere performance of his "Black, Brown and Beige Suite," a tonal history of the black man in America.

My wedding present to Willis Williams and his bride consisted of a pair of tickets to the above performance. My sister and I also attended. It was a memorable evening. Strange that this reminder of the past should impinge on my consciousness in just this way today.

May 25, 1974

# POST-WAR CONSUMER BOYCOTTS

*Anne Stein*

## THE WOMEN'S TRADE UNION LEAGUE

I joined the Washington Committee of the Women's Trade Union League in about 1936. I had been working with the farm workers who did not have a formal union. The WTUL at that time was both a delegate body with representation from various unions and an individual membership organization. Our primary function during the '30s was to organize unorganized women and to give assistance in labor struggles. So we wandered around and whenever we saw a picket line we checked them, and ran consumer boycotts, and obtained union support, especially if they were women workers.

There was one great struggle, for example, of waitresses in the George Mason Hotel in Alexandria. We manned their picket line for months and months and conducted tours and carried on all kinds of propaganda activity to get support for the strike. Through the WTUL we organized domestic workers, organized for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and organized the Cleaners and Dyers Union for a general strike. For awhile I also organized women's auxiliaries under the WTUL. Women's auxiliaries for the Red Caps, the Sleeping Car Porters Union, etc.

Our function, as we saw it, was to mobilize women in support of trade unions. For that we worked with a lot of middle-class women's groups. League of Women Shoppers, League of Women Voters. The League of Women Shoppers was a middle-class organization, and their major work was organizing consumer boycotts and working on legislation

for working women. They were active nationally and they were very active locally in Washington.

There was another movement going on which I was a part of in those days, and that was the National Negro Congress, which was organized in 1936. They gave us their headquarters on U Street for organizing. That was the headquarters for the Cleaners and Dyers strike. And their staff and our staff worked together. By staff I don't mean paid people, I mean the elected officers. A lot of people from Howard University were involved in this effort too.

The WTUL organizers were all women. Most of them, actually, were white. The WTUL itself was a predominantly black organization. In Washington, we had a black president of our chapter for a long time. The majority of the members were members of the unions we had been participating in developing. And it was mostly a black organization with close working relations with the National Negro Congress. So it was an integrated group, but predominantly black, always.

Now the spirit of those years, '36 to '41, was predominantly one of organization, and it was the great opportunity for women to organize. Just talking broadly now. During the war, although thousands upon thousands of women from the Washington area went into the factories in Baltimore at the aircraft, Baltimore was a big industrial center; a lot of women went there. A lot of women from the WTUL became welders and so on. And the mood of that period was not trade-union organization, the mood of that period was to get the stuff out.

#### AFTER THE WAR

The price controls were lifted in stages after the war. By the spring of '46, all the prices were off, all the price control was off, and prices skyrocketed. I'll give you an example. I remember that ground chuck, hamburger, was 35¢ a pound under price control and immediately after it went up to about 70¢ a pound. It was a very enormous jump.

Of course there was an enormous amount of repressed demand because everyone had been living on chicken and eggs for a long time. The rationing on meat was quite rigid during the war.

The repressed demand really exploded and the prices really shot up. Well, there had been a federal consumer movement in the city for years under the Rochdale coops, a middle-class cooperative movement. There was a gas-line station and a grocery store. It never had a very great reach.

Sara Newman was the name of the woman who was in charge of the Rochdale coops. She came to see me in April or May of 1946. She said they wanted to form a really broad consumer movement to fight this price rise. We got together a lot of these different forces. I brought in a lot of the trade-union groups, including the women's trade-union league, and the auxiliary movement (which was quite strong at that point), and some of these women shoppers and women voters we had been working with in the '30s.

We set up something which as far as I can recall was called the Washington Committee for Consumer Protection. It was sort of an ad-hoc representative group; it was not an individual membership organization, but it was very spirited.

The first thing we launched was a meat strike. I have been fairly critical of the recent middle-class consumer meat boycotts. It was "don't eat and don't eat for one week"; big deal!

I think that the invention that came out of our group was, and still is, a useful concept. Our slogan was "Don't buy meat over 60¢ a pound." We had a button which said "Don't buy high." It was a good slogan, don't buy high, because that gave you an alternative. It also gave you a lever. If the butcher could not sell anything that was over 60¢ a pound, then he began stocking things that were selling and that did have a push-back process, because you can't have low cuts without also cutting your high-priced cuts. So they either wasted or they were reduced.

The form that our first action took was a pledge. We asked every consumer to pledge, to sign a pledge, not to buy any meat over 60¢ a pound. And in two weeks we got 40,000 signatures, in Washington, which was not a very large city at that time. We covered every single supermarket in the city. All day long. We had shifts at every supermarket, every organization contributed petitioners, signature gatherers. And everybody signed.





*Postwar anti-inflation demonstration.*

I learned something in that that was very interesting. When people sign a pledge, they mean to carry it out. Because for six solid weeks after those two weeks, it was impossible to sell any piece of meat for over 60¢ in Washington. And within a week all these stores began distributing leaflets, "sale on steak for 59¢ a pound". Everything was selling for 59¢ a pound! It was really fantastic.

Our basic approach on this was that the responsibility lay with the packers. We made it perfectly clear to the retailers that we were not fighting them, and to the farmers that we were not fighting them. We were fighting the monopoly packers. There were four companies. I think there are still only four. And they issued statements that they were only making a penny a pound, which was quite a lot considering how many pounds they produced.

The direct engagement was an anti-packer monopoly engagement. And our demand was for the reinstatement of price controls.

Now the movement caught on in a couple of other cities. But it never became a national movement, and we didn't have the contacts to establish a national movement. We re-

tained this network of local people. We had rallies and mass meetings of the people who did the leafleting, who did the petitions. And we got out a very simple card, which we gave to everybody in Washington, which said "Compare your prices." And we just listed all the old OPA prices on meats. And women went around in the stores carrying that card, women all over. The educational campaign was really excellent.

Then we took all these petitions and rolled them up into an enormous ball, a mountainous ball. We attached them one to another. It was the shabbiest looking thing you ever saw in your life, one continuous square rolled into a ball. And we brought it to the Senate to a hearing, and unrolled it, and covered the whole place. What a mess.

We also called for a strike on milk which was very effective. We were telling people to buy powdered milk, evaporated milk, condensed milk. We did have two different milk strikes and we did bring the milk price down. A lot of education had to be done. We were outside a giant supermarket and some women came in and I said, don't forget, don't buy milk. And she said, oh no, I wouldn't buy milk, I have it delivered.

The milk strike was organized by a coalition of middle-class and working-class women, but it was very heavily working-class and black too. The black community were going along without raising their own demands, though they bitterly resented what was happening. In fact, that was one of the reasons I got out of the consumer movement: it was a white ladies' organization essentially. And it became more and more awkward because I had been instrumental in bringing the black groups into the organization.

The meat strike was fun; I enjoyed that. But the movement was limited in terms of where it was going and what education people were getting out of it. The problems of my constituencies were not being directly addressed, neither the trade-union women nor the black women. The coalition then died out when we realized that price controls were not to be reinstated. There was a national publication, "Bread and Butter". It was a good publication; I was Washington correspondent. But during that whole period there were certain limited things one could do.

Meanwhile the CIO was changing. And the great movement of which we had been a part, which had so much momentum, fell to pieces after the war. In the late '40s the unions were being torn to pieces by the red-baiting. And of course the WTUL was not isolated from that scene. It was totally inept in that scene.

They gave up with a statement that they had accomplished their purpose, which to a degree they had. The WTUL served out its historical purpose. In the last years of the '40s most of its work was legislative. There was very little organizing being done. The Southern organizing drives had failed, and failed largely on the black question. (The black question became the watershed question.)

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# UNION W.A.G.E.

*Union Woman's Alliance to Gain Equality*

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*Bi-monthly newspaper. "Union WAGE's unique contribution is its focus on women in the trade union movement. Sexism in unions, negotiations on women's issues, techniques for organizing women are discussed. It also pulls together information on union conferences and organizing campaigns." Nancy Musser, President, Librarian's Guild, SFPL*

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## **American Labor on the Defensive: A 1940's Odyssey**

*Stan Weir*

It is impossible to discuss the condition of American labor in the 40's without brief mention of international working-class developments during the quarter-century prior to the World War II decade and without some examination of the formative period of the CIO in the 30's.

The Russian Revolution of 1917, still the epochal event of this century, experienced totalitarian reversal by the time of the General Strikes in San Francisco and Minneapolis. In what had been the Soviet Union there were no free functioning workers' councils or unions. The valiant revolutionary attempts made in Germany, Finland, Poland, and Hungary right after World War I had been crushed. The British General Strike of 1926, the Chinese Revolution of 1927-1929, and the Spanish Revolution of 1931-1939 all ended in bitter tragedy. The near-revolutionary situations were checked in Germany during the years just before Hitler came to power, and in France and Austria historical mo-

ments later. These defeats in turn made the drift toward world war inexorable. The major factor in the ability of the U.S. to pull out of the Great Depression in the 30's was the expanding market for war products. The resulting growth in employment provided mass-production workers with the main part of their ability to organize. It is ironic that the more rapidly the condition developed that would allow five million workers to join CIO unions in three years (1937-1940), the nearer would come the war that so tremendously accelerated the elimination of rank-and-file power in the new unions.

The 1935 decision of John L. Lewis to form a Committee of Industrial Organizations inside the AFL was a response to the seemingly spontaneous formation of independent local industrial unions, a movement which appeared as early as 1932. Lewis was not a radical social visionary, but he had great ambition supported by just as great an administrative ability. The leader of the one major union that was already industrial by nature, he recognized the power to be had from centralizing the new and mainly isolated industrial unions that were beginning to organize. Technology and historical circumstance selected him to head the drive. A hardened bureaucrat, he was faced with the need to respond rapidly, before the workplace revolts centralized themselves independently of any established bureaucratic structure and ideology. He had organizers, but not enough to accomplish such a "Herculean" job. He was forced to seek an alliance with the Communists, the only grouping that could provide him with what he lacked. They had cadres of organizers trained in the handling of radical situations during the Third Period of the Communist International, when it was their policy to organize dual unions. They eagerly responded to the offer extended by Lewis.

It is a tragedy that the often heroic activity of Communist field organizers was used for bureaucratic ends by Lewis and the top Communist labor policy makers. Down "below" in the ranks of the workers there was indeed a form of revolution in progress. The mass introduction of assembly-line techniques, particularly during the first World War and the 20's, had finally created the basis for the industrial unionism so long called for in various forms by the IWW,

the Socialist Labor Party of Daniel De Leon, and the Socialist Party of Eugene Debs. However, the workers who began to organize their own unions right after the Depression passed its deepest period viewed the industrial union organizational model as a means, not an end. They had become witness to the calculated "de-skilling" of millions of jobs. They had seen their nation nearly come apart in the credibility crisis of the Herbert Hoover administration. It was apparent to all that there was no political-economic stability at the international level. The press reported the existence of workers' struggles in other lands. These factors merged to create a liberating effect. Mass production, transportation, and maritime workers would lead an attempt to make a fundamental change in the nature of contract and grievance bargaining.

As practiced by the AFL unions prior to the 30's, collective bargaining had degenerated into negotiation for demands that are marginal to the one that is central in the daily life of all who work — that is, the amount of work that is to be done each day to obtain a wage. AFL leaders bargained for more pay and economic benefits, but did nothing to negotiate restrictions that would keep employers from getting back wage increases via officially unrestrained productivity programs. The new unions that would create the foundation of the CIO very early forced demands onto bargaining tables that were openly designed to increase employment and to limit speed-ups or increased workloads. While the first demand of the new unions had to be for union recognition, the motivation was improvement of working conditions. These unions would seek higher wages, impose work rules to check productivity drives, and obtain steward systems to daily police the gains won at the tables.

By its very nature, the drive that brought the right to bargain individual grievances as well as collective contracts became more than a union organizational campaign. Now, each night in industrial centers across the land, as thousands of "semi-skilled" production workers returned to their neighborhoods, homes, and families, fewer came to supper tables with bellies already full from a day's experience with submission. The nature of American home life experienced some liberation as summary firings and fore-

men's abilities to play favorites diminished. The side effects of the improvement were many; they are of major importance, but they are seldom discussed. Black workers, for example, had participated in the building of the new unions and thereafter utilized the grievance procedures like other workers. While this was a routine expression of union progress, however, it demanded that the whites observing it jettison a whole set of old cultural beliefs on how blacks supposedly act toward bosses while on the job. While few blacks had illusions that the CIO would bring them full equality on the job, it provided some ways for them to demonstrate to themselves and others the vital role they were performing in American industry.

Due to the nature of work in a number of industries, it was possible for the new unions to directly negotiate limitations on production. One of the best examples of this development is provided by the West Coast longshoremen who, in the period right after the 1934 San Francisco General Strike, won and enforced the demand that no more than 2100 pounds of break-bulk cargo could be hoisted on any sling, board, or net. Previously there was no limit at all. Loads up to 5,000 pounds were not uncommon. The limitation was secondarily a safety factor; its first function was to break the production routine in half with more than twice as many of the pauses that are necessitated by landing in or hoisting out loads. The "make work" demands that came out of factory situations could seldom be so direct. The rubber workers obtained a six-hour day while imposing some checks on their employers' ability to increase individual productivity. In other "factoryized" industries, piece work was eliminated or modified and standard hourly rates of pay were established, while inroads were made toward relatively more liveable production quotas. The United Auto Workers, during the term of their first president, Homer Martin, sought contractual language that would give the union in each assembly plant a voice in the setting of line speeds throughout the life of the bargaining agreement. This was the first time, and only time thus far, that the top UAW leadership made anywhere near a sincere attempt to serve this first need of the ranks, but the attempt was made.



The most frequently used effort to check production by the new unions was one that attacked the problem on a piecemeal basis. The right to strike over unsettled workplace floor grievances was sometimes contractually protected to a degree, but far more often was informally asserted and taken. Shop-floor stewards elected at individual departmental levels took the time and freedom to move about in their territory. Many performed the role of advocate rather than administrative agent. Grievants got immediate representation many more times than they would in later years.

By the end of the decade, when the independent CIO was still only three years old, its leadership in each industry was already consolidating its bureaucratic position. Having signed contracts that limited daily rank-and-file on-the-job initiatives, they were put in the impossible position of trying to lead the ranks while stripped of the one strength that could bring real success. They had little choice but to become isolated disciplinarians. For a time, however, out of the strengths of their recent victories, the ranks could check the bureaucratic drift here and there through the on-the-job bargaining by informal work groups, quickie strikes, slowdowns, and minor acts of sabotage. That local and even international officials of the new unions had only recently left the workplaces, meant that many among those who remained in the shops were personally acquainted with their higher officials and could use that familiarity to check bureaucratic drift to some degree. In both harsh and friendly ways, officials got reminders of their rank-and-file origins and sources of their new powers.

The ability of labor's ranks to sustain control over their leaders dwindled as warring European countries placed larger orders with American industrialists. New jobs were created. Increasing numbers of Americans left old jobs in plants they had helped organize and took higher-paying jobs elsewhere, sometimes in faraway cities. The focus of public attention began to move to military retreats and advances overseas. When France fell to Hitler's armies in 1940, the U.S. began open war preparations. The first peacetime draft army was about to be mobilized. The combination of conditions that in the 1930's had forced working-class and lower-middle-class Americans to initiate actions for social change was gone. Enormous change was now being imposed

on them by external forces, and there was a growing fascination with it. And, as a part of that change, the countless rank-and-file cadres that had built the unions at the point of production were already losing members to the armed forces and defense jobs. Educated militants who remained on the jobs they helped to organize found it difficult to sustain struggles against their employers and for internal union democracy. They had now to contend with the lower level of consciousness in the workers who were hired to replace the vanishing veterans of the organizing period. At the same time, those same rank-and-file organizers of the CIO who left to take war jobs found it difficult to mobilize the new defense workers on a militant basis; large numbers of those new heavy-industry workers were recruited from poor rural areas and so-called "marginal" jobs. Industrial employment at relatively high wages was for them an exciting new freedom.

Moreover, the unions in wartime industry were for the most part set up without rank-and-file participation. The right to represent this newly-mobilized segment of the labor force was handed to the now-established officialdoms in return for their "full cooperation with the war effort", as arranged by the Roosevelt administration. The contracts they negotiated in this way contained a "sweetheart" quality. Worse still, these contracts and the manner of their administration created for the employers and government the model from which to mold industrial relations in the post-war period: unconditional no-strike pledges, arbitration, and the inability to support grievances via strike action.

The change in all aspects of American life created by four years of total war mobilization were so great and came so fast that the population could not assimilate them. Veterans of the period, whether they served in the Pacific, Detroit, North Africa, San Francisco, Europe, Bayonne, India, or Peoria, would not be able for some time to comprehend the society to which they returned in 1946. This is not to say that Americans fully understood the currents of their world during the 30's; but for seven years, from 1932 to 1939 — from just this side of the depth of the depression until just before U.S. entry into the war that brought full employment — there was a sense of social progress. Each victory

over an employer, landlord, or governmental employment agency allowed the participants a sense of participation in a national movement. Part of each victory was the increased understanding of power relationships existing in the overall society. Feelings of being adrift decreased as large numbers discovered a role that allowed them to determine in part their own destinies. The coming of war did not strike dumb the people who built the new unionism of the 30's, but it did remove them from the work places and the social combinations inside the shops that were the basis of the organizing drives. Also, it geometrically accelerated the bureaucratization of their unions. They thereby lost a major facility through which they could assimilate their experience with change and in which they had previously been able to bank growing class consciousness. The employers and government were quick in taking advantage of the condition. Improvements in working conditions won in the 30's which had survived the war were increasingly "bought back" by the employers with wage and fringe-benefit increases. With only rare exceptions, the labor officialdoms, including the leaders of "Communist-led" unions, cooperated in the "sale". In its totality, the leadership of the mass movement of the 30's folded. The problems at work and in every aspect of American life signaled the need for leadership. That leadership was either unwilling, unavailable, or incapable. Social unionism was a war casualty. Not even independent or individual analyses of the post-war condition were forthcoming. Most of the well-known radical intellectuals and social critics, who had been so vocally anti-war until Hitler's attack on Russia or the "sneak" attack on Pearl Harbor, had become silent. For all union reformers, militants, and revolutionaries developed out of the experiences and ideologies of the 30's, World War II swept in a long period whose major characteristic has been isolation.

What follows are some of the 40's experiences of one who entered the labor force as that decade opened.

## SHIPPING OUT

In the early summer of 1940, a friend and I were walking from one factory to another in East Los Angeles trying to

find employers who would accept job applications. We were both five months out of high school. Unrelated to anything we had been discussing, one of us suddenly broke in with: "When in the hell is this war going to end? It's been going for years now, and it's still growing." In 1939 Franklin Roosevelt had announced that "...no American mother's son will die on a foreign battlefield." For that lie he was the more beloved — even worshipped. We needed that assurance to jump to in moments of quiet panic. As editor of the senior class book I had tried to get Roosevelt to write the forward and had failed. Still I had made the dedication to him and had written "The world is now closer to peace than at any time in the last decade."

France fell less than a year later. There were some few in America who were not so naive, but my attitudes were unfortunately far closer to the national norm.

I attended UCLA in 1941 and joined an eating cooperative: five days of meals for six dollars. There and in associated co-ops were a considerable number of young Communists. Through them I had my first contact of any kind with organized labor struggles. Representatives from the Vultee Air-



*The strike at North American Aviation in June, 1941.*

craft and other strikes visited to make speeches and collect money. We listened and made modest donations. On occasion we were also visited by Norman Thomas.

On the Monday morning after "Pearl Harbor" (December 8), the atmosphere was taut. Students moved from class to class with a jumpiness. Every male knew he would have to go. But each one had dreamed up a deal that might keep him out of the armed forces — or at least out of range of actual battle. I met no one who wanted to fight. The same was true of my friends across town working in factories. They too had individual schemes to avert the risk of death. The only youths of my acquaintance on either side of town who volunteered for duty were those whose civilian lives were in deep crisis; that is, they had serious personal problems or they were in the process of rebellion against university or industrial work-life. That there was no sentiment for the war should cause no consternation. Well into 1940 the media were popularizing anti-war views. I recall a particular monologue done by a well-known actor on coast-to-coast radio. Portraying a fictional Pittsburgh steelworker, the dramatically-accented voice delivered lines close to the following: "My name George Danovic. I came from the Old Country. I get job in mill. I love steel. I make wheels for railroad trains . . . . Then there is a war. I make things now to kill people . . . . I hate steel." Repeatedly, messages like this one from the media gave expression to our disgust with the coming war — to our growing uneasiness and sense of future appointment with some kind of guilt.

I was one of those in rebellion against the university system prior to the war. I didn't understand it. No one in my family or acquaintance had ever gone to college. I didn't know how to play the game. A philosophy course began a process that made me an atheist in a vacuum. The professor was one of those who at the Chancellor's request visited men's living groups to urge support for the war. I junked my books before finals and walked away. A week later I was in a merchant-seamen's training school. I never completed the training. I learned that one could get a regular berth on a ship without it.

I sailed on deck. The AFL Sailor's Union of the Pacific (SUP) had contracts covering all deck seamen on all organ-

ized West Coast ships, Andrew Furuseth was its top official starting in 1886, and the influence of the IWW that opposed him was still visible in the ranks. It would become a mid-World War II casualty. Secretary-treasurer was the highest office. There was no president. The SUP had been rejuvenated by the maritime strikes in 1934 and 1936-1937, when it won total control of hiring. Its main membership bases were the largely Scandinavian and Finnish steam-schooner men of the coastal lumber trade and the multi-racial Hawaiians of the sugar and pineapple "Island run". They had a healthy antagonism to all official authority. Even late in the war when these older men were many times outnumbered in the union by newer hands, no SUP members dared to buy themselves the phoney naval-type uniforms easily purchased along the waterfronts. The reverse was true in the National Maritime Union (NMU), based on the East Coast, which went along with the militarization at a time when the government was trying to destroy the civilian (union) status of merchant seamen.

My experience on my first ship was a liberation. The deck crew would not work if the chief mate put a foot on the main deck between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. I had never before seen on-the-job authority defied with immunity from retaliation. I felt I had found a channel through which to express all the resentments I carried from previous jobs and schools. Within a year I was sailing as a deck-crew union representative. Fights for better food, mattresses, showers, and draws against wages in foreign ports were made successfully, sometimes by lining up on the dock or going to a nearby bar at sailing time. By mid-1943 it was becoming impossible to sustain this sort of fight to protect conditions. The Coast Guard had recently taken over the issuance of seamen's papers from the Department of Commerce. Later in that year I came off a wheel watch (helm duty) just as the ship was about to cross the bar outside the Golden Gate, coming into San Francisco. On deck, the Chief Mate, a retired naval officer, had ordered the very-green crew to break out the cargo booms — dangerous work at any time, but deadly on a rolling deck. I shut off the steam to the machinery and notified the Mate that no gear would be broken out until we tied up alongside the dock. He ac-

cused me of trying to "take over the running of the ship" and left the deck. Nothing more was said. Two days later, when the entire crew went into the officers' messroom to sign off the ship and collect the voyage pay, the company informed me I would have to go to the Coast Guard in the Federal Building to get my money. I went there, but I had to give them my seamen's papers to get paid and was informed that I might get them back only after my "hearing" three days hence.

Two Coast Guard Lieutenant Commanders were already seated behind a large oak table when I entered the hearing room. They made no accusations. Instead they questioned me about my union activity and political beliefs. And, "... did I ever carry my union activity beyond union activity?" Several ships earlier I had met a member of the Workers Party. Like all the Marxist groupings it had members in the armed forces and war industries, but it alone refused political support to any war establishment or bureaucracy. Because of my experiences and resulting ideas it was the only socialist group that I could have joined. I did and was vulnerable before this Coast Guard tribunal. I asked if they were judging me for anything I had done or for what I thought. They double-talked. Finally, and as if begrudgingly, they returned my papers. Without them I would have been drafted into the army within weeks "under special circumstances". In every port this scene was being repeated daily on an assembly-line basis by this intelligence branch of the Coast Guard. NMU members I met waiting their turn at those hearings told me that their officials had given the Coast, Guard office space in the New York hiring hall.

I had two more of these hearings before the war ended. One for refusing to bring a Second Mate on watch a second cup of coffee. I had brought him the first traditional cup as I had relieved my watch partner at the helm. He wanted another as I was in turn relieved, but couldn't find it within himself to ask rather than order. He was recently out of an officer's school. The next hearing came after I refused to call the Norfolk shipping commissioner's agent "Sir" while he was signing on our crew. Both hearings followed the same pattern as the first. During the last hearing the head officer finally said that they were, "going to let me go this

time, but if I came back again it would look funny." His companion officer looked at him and said, "Yes, you'd laugh like hell." I followed up the opening with a question: "Does the sum of a collection of innocent verdicts equal a guilty one?" They indicated the hearing was over and shoved my papers at me, and I left with a motivation that remains. At no time did any of the maritime unions provide the defendants with representation. In time the Coast Guard would provide union officials with an effective way of dealing with oppositionists.

Shoreside employers used the same basic methods to intimidate defense workers, but couldn't do it as bluntly. Nevertheless, all militants experienced paranoia. "The slip of the lip may sink a ship" and "the enemy is always listening" said posters with block-letter slogans superimposed on a large ear. Yet it was clear that the word "enemy" had a double meaning... "subversive" supposedly meant "Hitler agent", but one only saw investigators looking for radicals. The Communists, however, were "on our side", one hundred and fifty percent patriots who branded all their critics "Hitler agents", "red baiters", and "Trotskyite Fifth Columnists". Those who were not members or friends of radical sects could make little sense of this area of their war-time experience. Always readily available around the NMU halls at that time, for example, were books like Sayer's and Kahn's THE GREAT CONSPIRACY, and pamphlets like George Morris' THE TROTSKYITE 5TH COLUMN IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT.

They helped create a lynch atmosphere. I do not use the term entirely in a figurative sense. Morris urged that those from the "cesspool" were enemies and should be "treated as such". He hailed the imprisonment of the "18 Trotskyites" who led the 1934 Minneapolis General Strike, and twice quoted a collaborative Teamster vice-president to make his own point: "If Trotsky had taken over at the time, Russia would probably today be a part of the 3rd Reich.... Fortunately, too many of his followers are not." (p. 13 and pp. 29-30)

American workers in this period faced many riddles, but none more bewildering than the one posed by the Stalinists. All that most unionists had ever heard about the Commun-



ists, whether in the labor or daily press, told them that the C.P. represented "revolution", but during the war they were such postured patriots that it would have been comic if they had not had so much official power over unionists' lives. The education program of the NMU was officially advertised as "Reading, Writing and No Striking". Both black and white seamen were told to forget their grievances for the "duration". The presence of Afro-Americans in the Communist-led unions were the Party's one cover for its ultra-conservatism.

The conflict between the NMU and the Sailor's Union and its affiliates became more dramaturgy than feud. It came to constitute a way of life in shoreside as well as maritime unions, between the United Electrical Workers (UE) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), between the UAW and the International Association of Machinists (IAM), between the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) and the Teamsters, and between more but smaller unions. Still, war industry continued to grow and the arrangement between the Democratic Party and the top labor leaders paid off in numerical growth of dues payers. In this way the war was very good to most of the high union officials.

#### THE UAW AND THE '46 STRIKE

In the mid-1930's two of the three Reuther brothers, Walter and Victor, went to Russia. They toured and even worked in factories. They returned as the organizing drive in auto got into full swing. They were back in Detroit only a few weeks when they visited a friend of mine who was the newspaper editor for a newly self-organized auto local. They asked him to forget all the "class struggle stuff" and work with them. For them, an American form of the Social-Democratic approach was now the "only thing that would work". They saw "the old" or more radical approach as "dead" and "off the agenda". Walter Reuther was early a UAW vice-president in charge of the GM department. During the war the three Reuther brothers (Roy plus Walter and Victor) carefully watched the growth of the Rank-and-File Caucus in the UAW. Led by anti-war radicals and mil-

itants, it stood as the only formally-organized force against the Conservative-Communist bloc that dominated the top offices. The Caucus opposed the Communist proposals for a return to piecework in auto and other giveaway programs. It was for rescinding the wartime no-strike pledge in order to stop the takeaway of working conditions being conducted by the employers who were using the war as an excuse to weaken the union and increase their government-guaranteed profits. In 1945, with the war still on, the Caucus forced a referendum in which 40% voted to take back the right to strike.

As the war ended, Walter Reuther was freed to move against the coalition leadership in control of the UAW represented by the conservative President R. J. Thomas and the Communist-oriented Secretary-Treasurer George Addes. The Thomas-Addes program for the union contained no more than the usual call for "substantial" wage increases — increases of the sort that would easily be wiped out in the growing post-war inflation. The ranks had just endured four years of wage freeze. The Thomas-Addes program did not provide a way to end the four-year lag. Further, the UAW leaders' overly eager wartime collaboration with the employers had made the Thomas-Addes leadership unpopular with the ranks. Also, the one reason for Reuther's inability to work with the Rank-and-File Caucus during the war — its opposition to the wartime no-strike pledge — was



gone. With a peacetime popularization of the R&F Caucus' program, he was able to take over the caucus. "Wage Increases and No Price Increases", "Open Industries Books", "Public Negotiations", "For a Sliding Scale Cost of Living Clause in the Next Contract" . . . with these slogans Reuther mobilized for the 1946 strike against General Motors. That strike became the keystone of the Strike Wave. It was an enthusiastic strike. Expectations were high. Wages but not profits had been frozen throughout the war. There was big catching up to do. After many weeks of striking the UAW strike was coming to a climax, and just hours before it did the Communist-led United Electrical Workers betrayed agreed-upon CIO strategy. It had been agreed earlier that the CIO mass-production unions in electric, rubber, and steel would hang back and let the settlement in the key industry, auto, be the pattern setter. The UE broke ranks, jumped in, and accepted an offer of 18¢ an hour. That became the reward to most mass-production workers for the weeks, even months, spent on the picket line. There was no real sense of victory. An opportunity to establish a current of movement in post-war labor struggles was missed. There were no movement ideas available. The Communists were in disrepute. Reuther could therefore turn to radical-sounding Social-Democratic rhetoric to build a cover for a standard labor bureaucracy. And, the vacuum of ideology would enable him to win over large numbers of former radicals with excellent reputations in the ranks.

But the blame for the routine settlement of the 1946 strike wave cannot be put mainly on the UE; the rank-and-file groupings that had built the CIO in each workplace had been atomized in the previous six-year period and the bureaucracies had hardened. CIO President Phillip Murray was not interested in seeing Walter Reuther become a full-blown labor hero and competitor. None of the top CIO leaders led their strikes with real enthusiasm, Reuther included. He had tried for a substantial wage increase and had obtained a cost-of-living clause for auto workers, but he had only half-heartedly presented GM with the demand for "wage increases without raising the cost of cars", "open the books", or "public negotiations".

## THE OAKLAND GENERAL STRIKE

The Oakland (California) General Strike was an extension of the national strike wave. It was not a "called" strike. Shortly before 5 a.m., Monday, December 3, 1946, the hundreds of workers passing through downtown Oakland on their way to work became witness to the police herding a fleet of scab trucks through the downtown area. The trucks contained commodities to fill the shelves of two major department stores whose clerks (mostly women) had long been on strike. The witnesses, that is, truck drivers, bus and streetcar operators and passengers, got off their vehicles and did not return. The city filled with workers. They milled about in the city's core for several hours and then organized themselves.

By nightfall the strikers had instructed all stores except pharmacies and food markets to shut down. Bars were allowed to stay open, but they could serve only beer and had to put their juke boxes out on the sidewalk to play at full volume and no charge. "Pistol Packin' Mama, Lay That Pistol Down", the number one hit, echoed off all the buildings. That first 24-hour period of the 54-hour strike had a carnival spirit. A mass of couples danced in the streets. The participants were making history, knew it, and were having fun. By Tuesday morning they had cordoned off the central city and were directing traffic. Anyone could leave, but only those with passports (union cards) could get in. The comment made by a prominent national network newscaster, that "Oakland is a ghost town tonight," was a contribution to ignorance. Never before or since had Oakland been so alive and happy for the majority of the population. It was a town of law and order. In that city of over a quarter million, strangers passed each other on the street and did not have fear, but the opposite.

Before the second day of the strike was half over a large group of war veterans among the strikers formed their own squads and went through close-order drills. They then marched on the Tribune Tower, offices of the anti-labor OAKLAND TRIBUNE, and from there marched on City Hall demanding the resignation of the mayor and city council. Sailor's Union of the Pacific (SUP) crews walked off the

three ships at the Oakland Army base loaded with military supplies for troops in Japan. By that night the strikers closed some grocery stores in order to conserve dwindling food supplies. In all general strikes the participants are very soon forced by the very nature of events to themselves run the society they have just stopped. The process in the Oakland experiment was beginning to deepen. There was as yet little evidence of official union leadership in the streets. The top local Teamster officials, except one, were not to be found; the exception would be fired five months later for his strike activity. International Teamster President Dave Beck wired orders "to break the strike" because it was a revolutionary attempt "to overthrow the government". He ordered all Teamsters who had left their jobs to return to work. (OAKLAND TRIBUNE, December 5, 1946)

A number of the secondary Oakland and Alameda County union leaders did what they could to create a semblance of straight trade-union organization. The ranks, unused to leading themselves and having no precedent for this sort of strike in their own experience, wanted the well-known labor leaders in the Bay Area to step forward with expertise, aid, and public legitimization. The man who was always billed as the leader of the 1934 San Francisco General Strike, ILWU President Harry Bridges, who was then also State CIO President, refused to become involved... just as he did 18 years later during the Berkeley Free Speech Movement struggles. The rank-and-file longshoremen and warehousemen who had been drawn to the street strike were out there on their own. No organized contingents from the hundreds available in the warehouse and longshore hiring halls were sent to help. No CIO shops were given the nod to walk out or "sick-out". Only through CIO participation could significant numbers of blacks have been drawn into this mainly white strike. The ILWU and other CIO unions would honor picket lines like those around the Tribune Tower or at the Oakland Army Base, but otherwise they minded their own business. Bridges had recently committed himself to a nine-year extension of the wartime no-strike pledge.

The one major leader of the San Francisco General Strike who would come to Oakland was the SUP's Secretary-Treasurer, Harry Lundeberg. On the second night of the

strike he was the principal speaker at the mass meeting in the overflowing Oakland Auditorium. He had been alerted when the strike was less than three hours old via a call from an old-time member at a pay phone on an Oakland street. By noon there were contingents composed mainly of Hawaiians acting as "flying squads", patrolling to find any evidence of strike-breaking activity. They enlarged upon their number by issuing large white buttons to all seamen or persons on the street that they knew. The buttons contained the words "SIU-SUP Brotherhood of the Sea". They represented the first officially-organized activity on the street. They did not attempt to run the entire strike or take over. It takes a time for seamen to get over the idea that they are somehow outsiders. The feeling is all the stronger among Hawaiian seamen ashore or residing in the States. They limited their activity to trouble-shooting. They won gratitude and respect. When Lundeberg spoke at the meeting, he had no program of action beyond that of the Oakland AFL leaders. But he got a wild response. He did not approach the microphone reluctantly. His demeanor reflected no hesitancy. Unlike the other speakers, he bellowed with outrage against the city council on behalf of the strikers. In a heavy Norwegian accent he accused: "These finky gazoonies who call themselves city fathers have been taking lessons from Hitler and Stalin. They don't believe in the kind of unions that are free to strike." All true, but whether he knew it or not, by focusing on the City Council and no more, he was contributing to the undercutting of the strike. Instead of dealing with the anti-labor employers and city officials through the medium of the strike, plans were already being formulated to deal with the crisis in the post-strike period by attacking the City Council through use of the ballot box. The top Alameda County CIO officials were making hourly statements for the record that they could later use to cover up their disloyalty. The AFL officials couldn't get them to come near the strike, but they could be expected to participate in post-strike electoral action.

The strike ended 54 hours old at 11 a.m. on December 5. The people on the street learned of the decision from a sound truck put on the street by the AFL Central Labor Council. It was the officials' first really decisive act of

leadership. They had consulted among themselves and decided to end the strike on the basis of the Oakland City Manager's promise that police would not again be used to bring in scabs. No concessions were gained for the women retail clerks at Kahn's and Hastings Department Stores whose strikes had triggered the General Strike; they were left free to negotiate any settlement they could get on their own. Those women and many other strikers heard the sound truck's message with the form of anger that was close to heartbreak. Numbers of truckers and other workers continued to picket with the women, yelling protests at the truck and appealing to all who could hear that they should stay out. But all strikers other than the clerks had been ordered back to work and no longer had any protection against the disciplinary actions that might be brought against them for strike-caused absences. By noon only a few score of workers were left . . . wandering disconsolately around the now-barren city. The CIO mass meeting that had been called for that night to discuss strike "unity" was never held.

In the strike's aftermath every incumbent official in the major Oakland Teamsters Local 70 was voted out of office. A United AFL-CIO Political Action Committee was formed to run candidates in the race for the five open seats on the nine-person City Council. Four of them won. The ballot listed the names of the first four labor challengers on top of each of the incumbents, but reversed the order for the fifth open office. It was felt that the loss was due to this trick and anti-Semitism. The fifth labor candidate's name was Ben Goldfarb. Labor's city councilmen were regularly outvoted by the five incumbents. However, the four winners were by no means outspoken champions of labor. They did not utilize their offices as a tribune for a progressive labor-civic program. They served out their time routinely, and the strike faded to become the nation's major unknown general strike.

The Oakland General Strike was related to the 1946 Strike Wave in time and spirit, and revealed an aspect of the temper of the nation's industrial-working-class mood at war's end. Labor historians of the immediate post-war period have failed to examine the Oakland Strike, and thus have

failed to consider a major event of the period and what it reveals about the mood of that time. In developing their analyses they have focused almost entirely on the economic demands made by the unions that participated in the Strike Wave. These demands were not unimportant. But economic oppression was not the primary wound that had been experienced daily during the war years.

The "spontaneous" Oakland General Strike was a massive event in a major urban area with a population similar to that of all major World War II defense-industry centers. Thousands had come to the Bay Area from all corners of the nation — rural and urban — in the early war years, and had stayed. Every theatre of war was represented among armed-forces veterans returning to or settling in this largest of Northern California's central city cores. The Oakland General Strike revealed fundamental characteristics of a national and not simply a regional mood. Its events combined to make a statement of working-class awareness that World War II had not been fought for democracy. Or, more pointedly, it was a retaliation for the absence of democracy that the people in industry and the armed forces had experienced while "fighting to save democracy in a war to end all wars". The focus of people's lives was still on the war. They hadn't fought what they believed to be "a war against fascism" to return home and have their strikes broken and unions housebroken. Emotionally, their war experiences were still very real, and yet they were just far enough away from those experiences to begin playbacks of memory tapes. The post-war period had not yet achieved an experiential identity. The Oakland Key System bus drivers, streetcar conductors, and motormen who played a leading role in the strike wore their Eisenhower jackets as work uniforms, but the overseas bars were still on their sleeves. Like most, they had lost four years of their youth; and while they would never complain about that loss in those terms, there were other related grievances over which resentment could be expressed.

#### THE CIO IN THE LATE 40'S

In the Fall of 1947, the Communist-oriented State CIO of California held its convention in Santa Cruz. I took the floor



as an elected delegate from a UAW local and moved to censure the leadership for its failure to bring any real support to the Oakland General Strike. Paul Schlipf, who was Secretary of the Alameda County CIO Council, took the floor to oppose the motion: "It was not a general strike, we weren't in it." With that bit of arrogant doublethink still puzzling the minds of some of the innocent, the bureaucracy's floor whip gave the signal, the gavel was brought down hard, and the next order of business was moved amid ecstatic cheers and stomping by the misled. It was enough to make one retch.

The same 1947 State CIO Convention was the scene of yet another major labor scandal. In the months after the war CIO President Phillip Murray felt pressured by the alliances he had made with the Communists throughout the war period. He counseled with the heads of three international unions. One was an open Communist, one an anti-Communist, and the other a "neutral". Murray assigned them to draft a resolution against Communism (that both he and the Communists could live with) to put before the National Convention. If this was done and it passed the convention "for the record", then Murray would not be forced to move against "Communist influence" in the CIO. The resolution was drafted and passed. It carried a statement to the effect that Communism could not be "tolerated" within the CIO. Following the National Convention, every State Convention had to fall in line by passing the same resolution. The leadership of the California convention put the resolution on the floor.

A young worker from the Long Beach Ford plant went to a floor microphone. He attacked the anti-CP resolution as "redbaiting and the basis for what will become a major witch hunt in American labor". The booing drowned out most of the rest of what he said. Dave Jenkins of the Marine Cooks and Stewards provided the answer. He accused the delegate from Ford and those of us who had risen to second his ideas of being "Trotskyites, the people who had opposed Roosevelt even during the war". Tremendous cheers followed this offering. Jenkins closed with the idea that it was sometimes necessary for progress that labor take stands that strengthened its position with the public. One

more speaker was recognized, a longshoreman from the prestigious San Francisco ILWU Local 1-10. A tall, thin, unsmiling man who made eye contact with no one, he went to the "mike" and delivered one sentence: "I'm a Communist and a longshoreman and the resolution is okay with me." Wild cheering ensued as the tragic figure hurried to his seat. The question was called, and the "ayes" were overwhelming. More stomping and cheering. The next order of business was moved. The countenances of the majority leaders beamed with looks that come with victory.

No records of this discussion appears in the published proceedings of the convention. Instead there is a resolution praising Phillip Murray for his courageous stands on civil liberties. Nor is there mention in the proceedings of the convention-floor confrontation on the Oakland General Strike. In fact there is no mention of the strike in any context. The proceedings reported that the joint efforts of the AFL and CIO in Alameda County which elected four union members to the Oakland City Council were indication of the tremendous potential the Independent Progressive Party (later led by Henry Wallace) would have in the 1948 elections. Opportunistic capers (like the 1947 CIO resolutions against the CP) caused many to be wrongly silent when the civil liberties of Communists came under full attack in the years that followed immediately.

The "Communist-dominated" unions were expelled from the CIO in 1949. Free and open debate within the CIO unions withered, and opposition was silenced. It was never again a healthy organization. It crawled into its merger with the AFL in 1955, and what little was left of the old CIO attitudes all but disappeared.

## CONCLUSION

Not until the mid-1960's was the rank and file of American labor able to begin to break the bureaucratic deadlock which still binds it. The ongoing fight is quite different from that which began in the early 1930's when the Communists were able to take the lead of almost every major rank-and-file struggle. For this we are in part indebted to the East Berlin Uprisings of 1951, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956,

and the Polish and Czechoslovakian Uprisings of the 1960's. At the same time, there are few if any illusions that any segment of the top labor officialdom has ideas or perspectives that can find a way out of the present crisis within the unions, industry, or society. In fact, the individuals in even the secondary stratum of top union leadership who are pushing for a break with old approaches probably constitute no more than a handful. While many of the old illusions have withered, there is as yet no formulation of an independent set of alternative ideas to guide the struggle of the ranks. As long as this ideological vacuum continues to exist, American workers will have to remain on the defensive.

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# **The End of Corporate Liberalism:**

## **Class Struggle in the Electrical Manufacturing Industry, 1933-1950**

*Ronald Schatz*

One of the most significant developments on the labor scene in the 1940s was the abandonment of liberal labor policies by G.E., Westinghouse and other large electrical manufacturing corporations. For several decades these corporations had exemplified the phenomenon that Professor William A. Williams and others call "corporate liberalism". During the 1920s Westinghouse provided its employees with benefits that ranged from noon-hour lectures, scholarships, pensions and disability insurance to picnics, suggestion boxes and a brass band and chorus. (1) In 1926 General Electric's President, Gerard Swope, asked William Green, head of the American Federation of Labor, to organize a new union of electrical manufacturing workers. In 1930 and 1931 Swope urged President Hoover and Governor Roosevelt of New York to inaugurate unemployment insurance, portable pensions for workers, and large public-works projects. (2) When industrial unions were being organized

*Opposite: General Electric workers in Philadelphia clash with police seeking to enforce a court injunction prohibiting mass picketing.*

during the mid-'30s corporations like Ford Motors and Republic Steel used private and public police to terrorize the workers they employed. By contrast, G.E., Westinghouse and Philco permitted labor-board elections to be held in their plants and sat down to talk with the United Electrical Workers union. These companies did not object that the union's leadership included Communists and other left-wingers. They reached agreements peacefully.

However, by the late 1940s the same corporations had become more hostile to unionism than firms of comparable size in other industries. G.E. and Westinghouse adopted an aggressively anti-union set of bargaining tactics known as "Boulwarism" — after G.E.'s Vice-President for Labor Relations, Lemuel Boulware. When combined with raiding by other unions and government assault on left-wing unionists, the effect of the corporations' new labor policy was devastating. The United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (CIO) had been founded in 1936 to organize all electrical manufacturing workers into one union. By 1943, with contracts covering roughly 600,000 workers, the union had nearly accomplished its goal. But by 1955, after six years of Boulwarism, inter-union rivalry and government assault, the union's membership had been reduced to 90,000. The industry's production workers, who had formerly been united in one union, were now divided among at least five major ones. Organizing of white-collar workers in the industry ceased. The break-up of the C.I.O. union in electrical manufacturing was a major defeat for the American union movement.

The most adequate theory of corporation labor policy currently available is the concept of "corporate liberalism" — a concept developed by William A. Williams and applied by James Weinstein, Ronald Radosh and other historians. In general, these historians argue that many of the most powerful business and political leaders of early and mid-twentieth century America accepted or even encouraged the organization of workers into unions. The corporate liberals' primary motive, these historians maintain, was to integrate workers more completely into the capitalist economic and political system. Among the most famous corporate liberals are Mark Hanna, Herbert Hoover, Bernard Baruch and

G.E.'s President, Gerard Swope, (3) This essay is intended both to analyze the conflict in the electrical manufacturing industry and to clarify the meaning of corporate liberalism. The questions to be asked are: In precisely what sense were the labor policies of the leading electrical manufacturing corporations liberal in the 1930s? For what reasons did those corporations maintain liberal policies? What caused them to abandon those policies in the 1940s?

\* \* \*

Consider first the economics of the electrical manufacturing industry. Electrical manufacturing is an industry which straddles both the consumer-goods and the producer-goods sectors of the economy. In our period it was a very fast-growing industry. Between 1929 and 1958 the sales of the electrical-machinery industry grew at three times the rate of American manufacturing industries as a whole. (4)

The industry as a whole is dominated by two firms, General Electric and Westinghouse. G.E. and Westinghouse are very large firms (the fourth and fifteenth largest industrials in 1959), but they operate in a market situation very different from that of other huge firms like General Motors, Ford, DuPont or A.T.&T. The electrical manufacturing industry produces an exceptionally wide range of products: everything from light bulbs and tiny switches through consumer durables like home refrigerators to giant turbines and locomotives. Capital requirements for entry to some of its sectors are low. The result is that while G.E. and Westinghouse dominate the industry as a whole, these giant corporations may face sharp competition from more specialized firms in the sale of any particular class of product they manufacture. (5) The market situation of G.E. and Westinghouse has an important influence on their labor and pricing policies. The electrical manufacturing giants have historically sought to standardize labor costs and product prices across the industry.

Several other economic characteristics of the industry are relevant. Electrical manufacturing corporations are perpetually developing new products and changing the techniques of production. It was in the manufacture of electrical machinery, as in other types of machine-building, that the

techniques of scientific management pioneered by Frederick W. Taylor were most strictly and intensively applied. Because scientific management creates large supervisory staffs and because the companies have big research departments, the industry employs unusually large numbers of white-collar salaried employees : foremen, time-study men, clericals, engineers, scientists and technicians of all kinds. In 1939, 27% of all employees in electrical manufacturing were outside the production ranks, compared to 19% in all other kinds of manufacturing, 14% in auto and 12% in steel. (6) Unionization of technicians, clerks, and engineers, therefore, has been a keen issue in the industry.

Finally, because the industry manufactures a wide range of products, the tasks performed by production workers in electrical manufacturing are more diversified than in most other mass-production industries. The work forces of G.E. and Westinghouse in the 1930s and '40s ranged from women beside conveyor belts assembling innumerable pieces of small machinery to highly skilled male workers with craft-union and socialist traditions who might spend weeks building a single turbine.

\* \* \*

The economic characteristics of the industry explain much about the labor policies adopted by G.E. and Westinghouse in the 1920s and '30s. The heads of both corporations were strongly hostile to craft unionism. The essence of craft unionism in metal-working industries was control of the work process by skilled workers. Corporations which were continuously introducing new methods of production could not tolerate the possession of such power by workers. In the strike-filled decade of World War I skilled workers at G.E. and Westinghouse built up powerful unions, only to see those unions broken by the early '20s. The generous employee benefit programs referred to earlier were established by G.E. and Westinghouse in the early '20s along with employee representation plans (i.e., company unions) as an alternative to craft unionism.

When Gerard Swope of G.E. asked William Green to found a new A. F. of L. union of electrical manufacturing workers in 1926, Swope insisted that it be an industrial union. This was why Green could not agree to Swope's request. The In-



ternational Association of Machinists and other A. F. of L. craft unions which had organized electrical workers in the previous decade already claimed jurisdiction over the industry. (7)

Why did Swope want the A. F. of L. to organize electrical manufacturing workers? Swope hoped that the new union would raise up the wage rates paid by G.E.'s smaller competitors to those paid by G.E. Swope suggested to Green that a new union could start by capturing G.E.'s company unions, then use the dues paid by G.E. workers to finance an organizing campaign among the smaller firms. (8) When the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (C.I.O.) was established a decade later, it followed precisely the course that Swope had suggested to William Green in 1926.

Gerard Swope was not the only electrical manufacturer who hoped to see a union organize his low-wage competition. In 1933 Philco, a Philadelphia radio producer with sales that were increasing rapidly despite the depression, was hit by a three-day spontaneous strike. Concerned about its reputation with the radio-buying public and anxious to resume production, Philco agreed to a remarkably generous contract with an A. F. of L. federal union. The contract gave the union an eight-hour day and forty-hour week, overtime pay and significantly higher wages than any other radio manufacturer was paying. However, Philco management exacted a pledge from the union that it would not seek higher wages until it had obtained the same rates from R.C.A., Philco's competitor across the river in Camden, and had gotten those rates incorporated into the N.R.A. codes for the industry. Philco continued to pay unusually high wage rates until 1938, when its sales finally fell. The company then reproached the union, which had since affiliated with the U.E., for failing to organize its competition, and tried to oust the local from its plant. (9)

Like Philco, G.E. and Westinghouse had little enthusiasm for a union confined to their own plants. The U.E. and General Electric did not sign a national agreement until 1938. The contract they signed then was an unusual one.

G.E. published a booklet called Q105A which described the terms on which it hired and fired production workers. In 1938, after having tried unsuccessfully to obtain a nation-

al contract the previous year, the U.E.'s officers proposed to G.E. that they add two clauses to Q105A, initial it, and call it a contract! One proposed clause would install a grievance procedure. The other specified that the contract would apply to all General Electric plants where the union won labor-board elections. Surprised at first, the company negotiators soon agreed. (10)

Why did the company and the union sign such a contract? In his book THEM AND US James Matles of the U.E. explains the two parties' decisions as follows. For the union the agreement was a foot in the door. It prevented a wage cut which might have been forthcoming in a depression year like 1938 and gave a guarantee of job security to workers who would otherwise have been afraid to join the union. From the company's point of view, the contract cost nothing and, by instituting a grievance procedure, put an end to the many slowdowns and strikes which groups of pro-union workers were causing on the floors of several key plants. By signing this contract, the U.E. had obtained a license to organize (but very little more) from G.E. (11)

Westinghouse refused to sign any contract with the U.E. until it was forced to do so by the Supreme Court decision in the Heinz case in 1941. Like Ford and the Little Steel companies, Westinghouse took the position that the Wagner Act only required it to bargain with the union representing its employees. We aren't compelled to agree to or sign anything, Westinghouse headquarters maintained. However, unlike Ford and the Little Steel companies, Westinghouse did not enforce its refusal to recognize a union by using police in the towns where its workers lived. Instead, during the period in which the central office refused to sign contracts, Westinghouse local plant managers actually bargained continuously with U.E. shop-floor leaders.

The N.L.R.B. did not certify a U.E. local at Westinghouse's East Springfield, Massachusetts plant until 1939, but plant management had bargained with union leaders there ever since a successful strike in 1933. (12) Pro-union workers began organizing at Westinghouse's huge East Pittsburgh works in 1935. Within two years they had amassed such strength on the shop floor that management had no choice but to bargain if it wished to maintain pro-

duction. As Matles recalls :

...about half the workers in Westinghouse had been organized — but without a contract or written grievance procedure. Thus constant stoppages, sit-downs, slowdowns, and piled-up grievances plagued production, as workers became steadily more militant and aggressive . . . .

... There was constant turmoil in the shops. Day by day the workers were consolidating their established locals — and organizing new ones. They gave Westinghouse neither peace, nor total war, just constant guerrilla action.

Local plant managers urged Westinghouse headquarters in downtown Pittsburgh to sign a contract with the union. In the interim they maintained the fiction of non-recognition by meeting with in-plant union leaders and then departing to post their decisions on bulletin boards as if they had been reached unilaterally. (13) In short, at Westinghouse in the late '30s I.W.W.-style unionism prevailed: there were no contracts; all agreements could be changed or broken by either party at any time; and grievances were settled immediately according to the strength of the workers on the floor of a shop. (14)

To sum up: On the eve of United States entry into World War II the United Electrical Workers union had obtained recognition from General Electric and Westinghouse without a major sitdown or strike. Smaller electrical manufacturers like Maytag and Emerson resisted the union fiercely. But compared to corporations of similar size in other industries, the resistance of the electrical manufacturing giants to unionism was mild. If ever there were corporations which merited the term "liberal" they were G.E. and Westinghouse in the era of Gerard Swope.

Yet the term "liberal" evades as much as it describes. The social outlook of their executives was only one of several factors which contributed to the willingness of these corporations to peacefully recognize the U.E. Of equal or greater importance were these: the unique market situation of large firms in this industry; the shrewd, single-

minded pursuit of contracts by the U.E.'s national leaders and, finally, the power of informal organizations of workers on the floors of key plants. Moreover, it should be emphasized that on a national basis the U.E. remained weak as late as 1940. The corporations had as yet paid little for their decision to recognize the union.

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The war years were a period in which the U.E., like other C.I.O. unions, was simultaneously weakened and strengthened. The union was weakened in two major ways. First, federal guarantees of union security habituated union leaders to winning gains without a fight. After 1942 labor-board elections and decisions made strikes for union recognition unnecessary, maintenance-of-membership clauses ensured a steady flow of dues into union treasuries, and inexperienced union officials sat side by side with federal and corporate executives in manpower, labor-board and war-production hearings. Second, the unions' collaboration in war-production efforts linked them in the minds of workers with controls and sacrifices which, as strike statistics reveal, were becoming increasingly unpopular after 1943. (15) Because of their fervent commitment to the U.S.-Soviet alliance, the U.E. national officers bound the union particularly closely to the war effort. In 1942 the union's officers recommended that electrical workers' bonuses for holiday and weekend work be paid over by the companies to the U.S. Treasury to help the government "pay the companies for whom we work for war products which we make". They also offered to push for an additional 15% increase in worker output if the companies would agree not to cut piece-rates. (16)

However, in another sense the union became stronger during the war. Under conditions of the war economy the U.E. grew enormously in size—so that after the war it was able, for the first time, to wage a national strike. In part the union grew directly with the sales and work forces of the companies. As the number of employees at G.E., for example, rose from 76,000 to 170,000, small locals quickly became large ones. (17) But under federal supervision the union organized new shops as well. During the war the U.E. won more than eight hundred representation elections in plants employing roughly 335,000 workers. At its peak the

union, which in September 1940 had bargained for 154,000 workers, had contracts covering 600,000 workers in thirteen hundred plants. By 1943 the U.E. had become the third largest union in the C.I.O., after the United Auto Workers and the United Steel Workers. (18)

In some respects the scope of the union's demands increased as well. For example, to boost the output of war plants U.E. officers pushed hard for the establishment of joint labor-management production committees at the shop-floor level. The federal government favored the establishment of such committees, and the U.E. leaders insisted both to their members and to the companies that the union had no desire to share management's tasks. Nevertheless, most managers concluded that the union was trying to take a share of their power. (19)

The union tried to end the companies' policy of paying a "community wage" — i.e., lower rates in regions where unions were few or weak. The U.E. pressed for company-wide bargaining with multi-plant firms and proposed bargaining on an industry-wide basis with the electrical manufacturers' association. (20)

The U.E. was able to significantly reduce pay discrimination by the companies against women workers. This was particularly important because of the large number of women workers employed in the industry. The proportion of women among G.E. workers, for example, increased from 20% in 1940 to roughly 40% in 1944. By 1945 the U.E. had over 260,000 female members — more than any other American union. By 1944 it had obtained equal-pay clauses in contracts covering 460,000 workers, and in 1945 the union obtained a War Labor Board order requiring G.E. and Westinghouse to cease pay discrimination. (21)

Finally, the war years saw the emergence of organization among white-collar workers for the first time in the industry's history. This was the most significant development of the war years. The U.E. acquired some white-collar members, particularly among production clerks and others whose jobs placed them close to production workers. But the most successful organizing of white-collar workers was carried out at Westinghouse by the unaffiliated Federation of Westinghouse Independent Salaried Unions. The U.E.

leaders tried to take members from the Federation, describing it as a company union which was being played off against the U.E. by Westinghouse management. But "company unionism" is an inadequate description of the mentality of the Federation's leaders, who combined a residual belief that the interests of the company and its employees were one with an angry conviction that their members' contributions to the war effort and the company had not been fairly rewarded. (22)

In September 1945 the white-collar Federation struck Westinghouse to demand a wage increase and inclusion under the same incentive bonus plan as production workers. It was the first national strike of the post-war era. The strike was solid and within two weeks had compelled Westinghouse to lay off 30,000 non-striking production workers. Although the strike ended inconclusively, as each local of the Federation reached separate settlement terms, BUSINESS WEEK reported that some observers considered this strike to be "...the most significant since the C.I.O. crashed into the mass-production field in 1936."

If... (the Federation of Westinghouse Independent Salaried Unions) can win, ... (the) victory may open up to unionism the biggest area of unorganized territory still remaining 'open shop.' (23)

Like the U.E. and the white-collar Federation, the corporations too emerged from the war with enhanced confidence and power. The electrical manufacturing corporations were among the country's major war producers. Between 1940 and 1945 General Electric sales rose 350%. For Sylvania, a much smaller firm, the increase amounted to 1600%. (24) In 1945, because of a backlog of consumer demand and the development of new products such as television and radar for civilian aircraft, the corporations anticipated at least several years of high demand for their products. They did not intend to return to pre-war levels of sales and profit. (25) In sharp contrast to their attitude at the close of the First World War, BUSINESS WEEK wrote in June 1945, most large corporations did not seek to re-establish the open shop. Nonetheless, the journal warned:

"The unions will not find opposition as soft as it has been."  
(26)

Beginning in September 1945, massive numbers of workers went out on strike in the meat-packing, railroad, auto, steel, coal-mining, flat-glass, machine-tool, textile, trucking, electrical manufacturing and other industries. The principal demand in most of these strikes was for a large increase in hourly wage rates. The three biggest C.I.O. unions — the unions of auto, steel and electrical workers — proposed increases of 25 to 30% each. To demand wage increases of this magnitude in the political and economic context of 1945-46 had profound implications.

The strikes followed a half-generation of relentless change in the economy, particularly as it affected the condition of working-class life: depression from 1930 to 1935, recovery and the establishment of industrial unions in 1936-37, renewed depression in 1937, another round of strikes in 1941, and war boom and a managed economy from 1941 onward. During the war the federal government did not allow wage rates to rise as fast as the cost of living, but because workers put in long hours of overtime take-home pay rose significantly. In the summer of 1945 overtime ended and lay-offs began. The incomes of industrial workers fell precipitously. The demand for increases in hourly wage rates was concerned, first, with the question of the standard of living. Would it return to the level of 1929? 1936? 1940? What standard of comparison was relevant? (27) By demanding a 30% increase in hourly rates in the fall of 1945 the C.I.O. unions in effect proposed that workers retain their high wartime standards of living while laboring only forty hours per week. (28) The initial response of Westinghouse was to suggest that workers' take-home pay could be increased if the work week was extended to 44 hours. (29)

The second question raised by the demand for a 30% increase was: What will be the distribution of income in the United States? Perhaps the question came more easily to the minds of persons who had been living in a managed economy for five years than it does to Americans today. In public statements issued throughout 1946 C.I.O. and corporation spokesmen debated the relationship between the wages paid and the prices charged by the largest corpora-

tions in the United States. Of the unions striking in 1945 and 1946 only the United Auto Workers raised the question of income distribution explicitly in its demands. The U.A.W. proposed that General Motors pay a 30% wage increase without increasing the price of cars — in other words, that the company pay the wage increase out of its profits. But it was apparent, at least to corporate managers, that the question of income distribution was involved in strikes by workers in other industries as well. G.E. President Charles E. Wilson protested vigorously against the frequent assertion that the size of wage increases should be determined in part by companies' "ability to pay". A. W. Robertson, the Board Chairman of Westinghouse, insisted that even if wage rates remained stationary, a 15% increase in prices was necessary. (30) G.E. and Westinghouse refused to settle the 1946 U.E. strike until they had received permission from Washington to increase product prices. Indeed, by February 1946 BUSINESS WEEK reported that "the real issue" in the auto, steel and electrical manufacturing strikes "was no longer wages but prices." (31)

Finally, from management's point of view the 1945-46 strikes concerned the question: Who runs the corporations — them or us? Most employers, BUSINESS WEEK reported at the peak of the strike wave in January 1946,

"were prepared . . . to ride along with the judgment of the leaders of the business community who held that the time had come to take a stand . . . against further encroachment into the province of management." (32)

The testimony, speeches and interviews given by top industrial managers in 1945 and 1946 are filled with fear that unions were taking away their power to direct their corporations. The views held in 1946 by managers of firms in electrical manufacturing and five other industries are analyzed in Neil W. Chamberlain's volume THE UNION CHALLENGE TO MANAGEMENT CONTROL (1948). The managers Chamberlain interviewed believed that in the years since 1937 industrial unions had acquired power not only over wages and hours but also over the discipline of employees and, by insisting on the seniority principle, over



lay-offs, rehiring, allocation of workers and promotions. These managers feared an increase in union interest in types of machinery, equipment and methods of production. Chamberlain paid little notice to that side of his evidence which revealed that an industrial union may serve as a source of supply of disciplined labor for the corporation. What stood out in the nineteen-forties was the "revolutionary aspect of collective bargaining". "It is the very mechanism by which organized workers may achieve control and exercise it jointly with management." Because of the increasing power of unions and the Labour victory in the 1945 British elections some of Chamberlain's respondents had concluded that in the long run some form of socialism in America was inevitable. (33)

On January 15, 1946, 200,000 U.E. members stopped work at General Electric, Westinghouse and the electrical division of the General Motors corporation to demand a \$2-per-day wage increase. Like the strikes in auto and steel, the electrical manufacturing strikes were settled by May at the latest with wage increases of 18¢ to 19¢ per hour. (34) While raising the general questions described above, the U.E. strikes had unique characteristics which caused management reaction to be particularly sharp.

The recent history of the electrical manufacturing industry was quite unlike that of steel, which had known bitter strikes in 1919 and 1937, or auto, in which General Motors had recognized the United Auto Workers only after the union won strikes in 1937 and 1939. The 1946 strikes were the first national strikes in the electrical manufacturing industry and the first major strikes G.E. and Westinghouse had known since 1918.

These bitter conditions... have never been obvious in our own relationship with our people before they were unionized, or after they were unionized. I mean we haven't had bitter and bad controversies between the management and the unions.

So G.E.'s President, Charles E. Wilson, complained with some justification during the 1946 U.E. strike. (35)

The U.E.'s demand for \$2 per day was roughly the same size as the demands made by the auto and steel workers' unions. But because labor represents a higher proportion of total costs in electrical than in either auto or steel manufacturing, and because electrical workers' wages had been lower than those of workers in either of these other industries, the demand made by the U.E. was in fact especially large. (36)

Moreover, unlike most of the 1946 strikes, the U.E. strikes against G.E. and Westinghouse were violent. While the auto and steel unions permitted supervisory personnel to cross their picket lines, at some plants U.E. strikers would not allow white-collar workers, whose role in electrical manufacturing is particularly great, to cross their picket lines. At other plants G.E. and Westinghouse tried to bring in non-striking production workers. Union pickets kept 12,000 white-collar employees from entering the huge G.E. works at Schenectady. Westinghouse and G.E. sought injunctions limiting the union to ten pickets. In Philadelphia; Bridgeport, Connecticut; and Newark, Kearny and Bloomfield, New Jersey, the U.E. set up massive picket lines in defiance of the injunctions. Attacks by club-swinging and mounted police followed. (37)



Finally, it is important to recall that after 1946 the conflict in the electrical manufacturing industry occurred against a background of Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. The leadership of the U.E. was strongly opposed to that war, while the electrical manufacturing corporations were to rely heavily on military contracts engendered by it. The corporations were linked as closely to the Cold War as they had been to the war against Germany and Japan. The President of Emerson Electric, Stuart Symington, was appointed Secretary of the Air Force in the Truman Administration. Charles E. Wilson of G.E. was a top federal economic planner during World War II and the war in Korea. (38) The battles he fought merged in Wilson's mind as he declared in October 1946: "The problems of the United States can be captiously summed up in two words, Russia abroad, labor at home." (39)

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After 1946 G.E. and Westinghouse abandoned the liberal labor policies they had maintained in earlier decades. G.E. adopted the policy named after the company's newly-appointed Vice President for labor relations, Lemuel Boulware. The heart of Boulwarism was the tactic of hearing out the demands of union representatives, then, with little advance notice to union leaders, announcing the company's contract proposals in a massive publicity campaign aimed at the towns in which G.E. workers lived. The company's offer was not subject to change in any significant way. By refusing to engage in a process of give-and-take with union representatives, G.E. was attempting to persuade its employees to withdraw their support from the union by demonstrating that the union lacked the ability to win any gains for them. By a publicity campaign aimed at the towns in which G.E. workers lived, the company sought to deprive the U.E. of the community support it had received during the 1946 strike.

Boulwarism per se was simply an unusually aggressive negotiating tactic. What made the policy so effective was a civil war between unions. In the late forties the U.E., supporting Communist Party positions on political issues, quarreled with the C.I.O.'s endorsement of United States foreign policy and its insistence that member unions sup-

port Harry Truman for re-election in 1948. When C.I.O. headquarters tolerated raids by other unions on U.E. shops, the U.E. ceased paying dues to the C.I.O. treasury. The C.I.O. responded by chartering another union in electrical manufacturing, the International Union of Electrical Workers (I.U.E.), headed by James Carey, an anti-Communist liberal and former U.E. President.

At this point Westinghouse and G.E. intervened. Utilizing the recently enacted Taft-Hartley Act, the companies canceled all union contracts and asked that labor-board elections be held to determine which union legally represented their employees. The election campaigns were held against a background of legislative hearings on the question of whether American security was endangered when workers in plants with defense contracts were represented by the U.E. The election results varied, but the net effect was that electrical workers, who had been united in one union, were divided among the I.U.E., the U.E., the Machinists, Auto Workers, Teamsters and other unions — none of which could bargain effectively. Westinghouse and G.E. applied Boulware-like tactics to the U.E. and I.U.E. alike. And so the wages of electrical manufacturing workers, to cite one measure of union strength, fell increasingly far behind those of auto and steel workers in the 1950s. Electrical workers remain divided today, although the major unions in the industry did co-operate and compel G.E. to make concessions to them in the strike of 1969. (40)

To understand corporation labor policy it is not sufficient to look, as the Williams school of historians does, only at the ideas of corporate leaders and at the corporation side of the worker-company relationship. One must also look at the activities of workers and at the economic situations in which corporate managers find themselves. Otherwise, it is not possible to explain why a company adopts a particular labor policy or why companies change their policies with alacrity. This conclusion is borne out by the history of the electrical manufacturing industry. Westinghouse and G.E. maintained liberal labor policies in the 1920s and '30s for quite concrete reasons. In the mid-1940s the managers of both corporations decided that such policies no longer served their firms' purposes. (41) The United Electrical

Workers, which had been a relatively weak union when they recognized it, had become capable of conducting a national strike; of reducing wage differentials between workers of different regions, skill levels and sexes; and of limiting the power of management to direct in-plant operations. Equally important, the large white-collar sector of the industry was beginning to be organized. The high level of post-war demand for their products made the companies eager to have full freedom of action, while the emergence of the Cold War isolated the leaders of the union. For these reasons the leading electrical manufacturing companies abandoned liberal labor policy in the 1940s.

#### FOOTNOTES

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5. IBID., 74-77, 87-89, 115.

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7. Irving Bernstein, THE TURBULENT YEARS: A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN WORKER, 1933-1941 (1971), 383-384, 603-604.

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9. Milton Derber, "Electrical Products", in Harry A. Millis, et al., HOW COLLECTIVE BARGAINING WORKS: A SURVEY OF EXPERIENCE IN LEADING AMERICAN INDUSTRIES (1942), 782-789.

10. IBID., 752-753; James J. Matles and James Higgins, THEM AND US: STRUGGLES OF A RANK-AND-FILE UNION (1974), 82-83.

11. Matles and Higgins, 83-85.

12. Derber, 772-776.

13. IBID., 760-772; Matles and Higgins, 30, 35, 76, 78, 122; unpublished paper by Judy Rosen, University of Pittsburgh, 1973.

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19. Julius Emspak, "Labor-Management War Production Councils", SCIENCE & SOCIETY 7:1 (Winter 1943), 88-96; Lee H. Hill and Charles R. Hook, Jr., MANAGEMENT AT THE BARGAINING TABLE (1945), 65-72.

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21. Miller, 237; William Henry Chafe, THE AMERICAN WOMAN: HER CHANGING SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ROLES, 1920-1970 (1972), 140, 154-158; Sheila Tobias and Lisa Anderson: "What Really Happened to Rosie the Riveter? Demobilization and the Female Labor Force, 1944-47", MSS Modular Publications (1974), 11.

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25. BUSINESS WEEK, 5/5/45, 31; 5/19/45, 7; 8/11/45, 84, 86; 11/10/45, 44.

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27. "UAW Vs GM", THE NEW INTERNATIONAL, 11:9 (December 1945), 259-261; "The Strike Wave", NEW INTERNATIONAL 12:1 (January 1946), 3-5.

28. BUSINESS WEEK, 9/8/45, 95-96; Art Preis, LABOR'S GIANT STEP (1972), 258, 262.

29. Testimony of A. W. Robertson, Board Chairman of Westinghouse, to the United States Senate, Committee on Education and Labor, Hearings... on S. 1661, A BILL TO PROVIDE FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF FACT-FINDING BOARDS TO INVESTIGATE LABOR DISPUTES (1946), 458, 494-495; NEW YORK TIMES, 2/12/46, 3/3/46. For G.E.'s response, see Matles and Higgins, 140-141.

30. Committee on Education and Labor, HEARINGS..., 486, 641.
31. BUSINESS WEEK, 2/23/46, 93; 3/9/46, 84; 2/2/46, 15-17; NEW YORK TIMES, 2/11/46, 2/18/46, 2/23/46, 2/25/46. For an analysis of the significance of company pricing policies in the 1946 strike wave, see Thomas R. Brooks, TOIL AND TROUBLE (1971 edition), 211-218.
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33. Neil W. Chamberlain, THE UNION CHALLENGE TO MANAGEMENT CONTROL (1948), ix, 87 ff., 105, 165, 210-211. Chamberlain completed his research in October 1946.
34. The 1945-46 strikes in electrical manufacturing and other industries are described in Preis, ch. 23; Brooks, ch. 16; and Matles and Higgins, ch. 10.
35. Testimony before Committee on Education and Labor, HEARINGS..., 647.
36. Backman, 250.
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40. For more complete accounts of Boulwarism, see IBID., ch. 11-15; Meyerowitz, 70-94; Herbert R. Northrup, BOULWARISM (1964); and Salvatore J. Bella, "Boulwarism and Collective Bargaining at General Electric" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1962).
41. See Northrup, 21.

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# **Working-Class History In the 1940's:**

## **A Bibliographical Essay**

*James Green*

Given the importance of the 1940's for the development of the working class in the U.S., it is surprising that there are not more good sources available in book form. There are several possible explanations for this. First, the 1940's may be too close to permit adequate analysis; but this seems unlikely, since there is no lack of documentary evidence about workers during the World War II era. Furthermore, there is a well-developed body of leftist history about the conduct of U.S. foreign and military policy by Gabriel Kolko, Barton Bernstein, Gar Alperovitz and others. In fact, there are even two fine exposes of domestic repression under the Truman administration by "revisionist" historians who have questioned the assumptions of Cold War liberal historiography. See Athan Theoharis, *THE SEEDS OF REPRESSION: HARRY S. TRUMAN AND THE ORIGINS OF McCARTHYISM* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1971) and Richard M. Freeland, *THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE AND THE ORIGINS OF McCARTHYISM: FOREIGN POLICY, DOMESTIC POLITICS AND IN-*



TERNAL SECURITY, 1946-48 (New York: Knopf, 1972).

The problem really is that there are no critical social historians of the 1940's. There are a few standard labor histories of the Truman era, but in most cases they do little more than provide a political history of government labor policy. The best of these is Joel Seidman's AMERICAN LABOR FROM DEFENSE TO RECONVERSION (University of Chicago, 1953), but it is out of print, as are many important books about the 40's. In any case, Seidman's book does not include much social history of workers during and after the war; his statistics provide a profile of the changing composition of the working class, but his commentary says little about the significance of those changes.

In other words, another gap in our knowledge of the 1940's results from the fact that academic historians, and many left analysts as well, dwell on the institutional and organizational developments affecting workers during and after the war. There is very little social or economic history of that period that might reveal developments that affected the whole working class. Instead of working-class history, we have labor history, which focuses largely upon the leaders of organized workers. There are some intellectual reasons for this bias in the literature. First of all, there is, for some unexplained reason, much more personal testimony by rank-and-file workers about the 1930's than there is about the 1940's. There is nothing comparable to Studs Terkel's HARD TIMES: AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION (New York: Avon paperback, 1970), which treats the World War II era. Alice and Staughton Lynd, eds., RANK AND FILE: PERSONAL HISTORIES BY WORKING-CLASS ORGANIZERS (Boston: Beacon paperback, 1972) includes some commentary on the 1940's, but most of the personal histories offered by militants typically dwell on the 1930's. Secondly, there are a number of academic social-science studies about workers which obscure any understanding of class consciousness because they are biased by a pluralist methodology and a liberal view of the postwar U.S. in which "the lower classes" were becoming affluent and thoroughly integrated into "middle-class" life. Most of the big sociological studies of the period, including Gunnar Myrdal's classic AN AMERICAN DILEMMA (New York: Harper, 1944), which offers a very moralistic expla-

nation of racism, do not advance our understanding of the social history of workers in this period. A third problem is that even those historians who were not confused by the sociologists' efforts to replace Marxian class analysis, nevertheless find it difficult to analyze the complex developments that took place in class relations during and after the war. The 1940's did not witness the striking transformations in class consciousness that occurred during the Depression, when there was a "making" of a white, male working-class identity that did not exist as coherently in the 1920's. In fact, the war years brought a great influx of blacks and women into the working class. But this period did not see a significant integration of these newcomers into the conscious working class or its institutions. And so historians on the left who have made a class analysis of the 1940's tend to ignore the internal divisions among workers which heightened during this period and certainly affected class consciousness in important ways.

For example, in Art Preis's penetrating survey of the period, *LABOR'S GIANT STEP: TWENTY YEARS OF THE CIO* (New York: Pathfinder paperback, 1964), there is a fine political history of labor in the period, but very little social history of the working class. Formerly the labor editor of the Socialist Workers Party newspaper *THE MILITANT*, Preis writes a lively journalistic history of the various ways in which CIO leaders joined AFL bosses in selling their members down the river in the 1940's in order to curry favor with Roosevelt and Truman, despite their increasingly anti-labor actions. In fact, Preis's history of labor in this period is perhaps the only survey which is consistently critical of the CIO leaders and the Communist Party leaders in the unions, who are seen by Preis as being all but indistinguishable. Of course, the author is a Trotskyist who has an axe to grind with the Communists — invariably pictured as reactionary "misleaders" of labor. As a result, *LABOR'S GIANT STEP* tends to exaggerate the influence of the CP in disciplining workers during the war and in bureaucratizing the CIO throughout the period. This results from the author's implicit and highly dubious assumption that if the CP had had the correct line, it could have provided revolutionary leadership for the working class in this period. Preis's unflinching attack on the Com-

munists and on other CIO leaders like Murray and Hillman, who continued to support the Democratic Party in spite of its anti-labor policies, leaves him hoping that John L. Lewis, generally portrayed as a hero, will start a labor party of the kind Trotsky called for before he was assassinated. Preis does not explain all of the political roots of Lewis's independence from the Democrats, nor does he explain all of the tangible reasons AFL and CIO leaders remained firmly attached to Roosevelt and Truman. After Preis is finished muckraking the Democrats, it is also unclear why millions of rank-and-file unionists continued to vote for the party of FDR. It is not sufficient to say that these voters simply followed the "misleadership" of CIO chiefs like Murray and Hillman. It is important to understand the changed role of the state in labor affairs during wartime, when the federal government was not only an oppressor, as Preis would have it, but also a protector of trade unionism. In fact, despite Preis's unflinching support for rank-and-file struggles, LABOR'S GIANT STEP is still written from the top down. And so, it tells us very little about the rank-and-file workers of the 1940's that would help to explain how the CIO and Democratic Party bosses maintained hegemony in the labor movement. Certainly, there was more involved than trickery.

C. Wright Mills, who shared Preis's critical view of the Communist Party from a non-Trotskyist position, tried to explain the rise of the union bureaucrats in THE NEW MEN OF POWER, written "with the assistance of Helen Schneider" (New York: Harcourt Brace, out of print). After discussing the CP as a potential source of socialist leadership, Mills explained that the new labor leaders were linked to the section of the capitalist class that wanted to integrate labor unions through state apparatus. This emphasis on what later would be called "corporate liberalism" influenced New Left labor historians like Ronald Radosh, who stressed the bureaucratization of the CIO without sharing Preis's Old Left faith that it could have been any different. However, Mills' analysis was just as top-heavy as Preis's, and so it failed to explain whether or not rank-and-file workers supported corporate liberalism or class collaboration as strongly as their leaders. Mills was an independent leftist who wanted to re-educate liberal leaders to socialism rather than replace them with "real" Marxist-Leninists of the kind Preis

looked to as the vanguard; but Mills maintained a perspective, similar to that of the Old Left, which looked to union leadership rather than to the rank and file for political direction.

In other words, there are political reasons as well as methodological and intellectual reasons for the gaps in our knowledge about the 1940's. For example, in the autobiographies of left labor organizers who were active in the period, there is invariably far more about the 1930's than there is about the following decade. This applies to Trotskyists as well as Communists, but for significantly different reasons. For Trotskyist labor militants like Farrell Dobbs — author of *TEAMSTER REBELLION* (New York: Pathfinder, 1972) and *TEAMSTER POWER* (New York: Pathfinder, 1974) — the 1930's were far more eventful and exciting (especially from the perspective of Minneapolis, where the Trotskyists had a strong hold in Teamster Local 544) than the 1940's, when his party (the Socialist Workers Party) was isolated by its opposition to the war and repressed by the federal government under the Smith Act. For Communists like Wyndham Mortimer, Hosea Hudson, and Al Richmond (all the authors of recent autobiographies), the 1930's were also far more exciting and satisfying than the 1940's, when their party opposed working-class militancy during the war and afterwards fought a torturous battle against anti-Communist purges. This is especially obvious in the recent autobiographical account of the United Electrical Workers by its secretary-treasurer, James Matles, *THEM AND US: STRUGGLES OF A RANK-AND-FILE UNION* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1974), co-authored with James Higgins, in which the role of the Communist Party in the UE is not discussed in the 1930's or in what little is said about the 1940's. Even Len DeCaux's excellent autobiography, *LABOR RADICAL: A PERSONAL HISTORY* (Boston: Beacon paperback, 1970), which does discuss party affairs in the 1940's, ignores the main problems posed by changes in the CP line when it came to holding working-class support. George Charney's *A LONG JOURNEY* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1968), which offers the best critical analysis of the party written by a CP leader, unfortunately lacks much information about the Communists' trade-union activity, because the author was concerned with other areas

of party policy. The same is true of Joseph Starobin's new history, *AMERICAN COMMUNISM IN CRISIS, 1943-1957* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1972), which focuses primarily on foreign policy, the author's primary concern when he was a party member. Like Norman Markowitz's critical study, *THE RISE AND FALL OF THE PEOPLE'S CENTURY: HENRY A. WALLACE AND AMERICAN LIBERALISM, 1941-1948* (New York: Free Press, 1973), Starobin's scholarly book offers an excellent political history of Popular Front activity in the 1940's which is not marred by the knee-jerk anti-Communism of liberal and social-democratic historians. But neither Starobin nor Markowitz tells us much about the masses of people, including industrial workers, who supported the CP and the Wallace campaign of 1948.

The same problems apply to most biographies of leading labor figures of the 1940's. For example, Saul Alinsky, *JOHN L. LEWIS, AN UNAUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY* (New York: Vintage paperback, 1949), Matthew Josephson, *SIDNEY HILLMAN* (New York: Harpers, 1952, out of print), and Charles P. Larrowe, *HARRY BRIDGES* (New York: Lawrence Hill, 1972) all provide far more information about the 1930's than they do about the 1940's, when all three of these union leaders were very influential. The major exceptions are Irving Howe and B. J. Widick, *THE UAW AND WALTER REUTHER* (New York: Random House, 1949, out of print), which provides a useful but very uncritical account of Reuther's rise to power in the 40's, and Jervis Anderson, *A. PHILIP RANDOLPH, A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY* (New York: Harvet paperback, 1972), which provides a fascinating but brief account of Randolph's remarkably successful efforts to build a mass movement of blacks to desegregate defense jobs, unions, and the armed forces.

Undoubtedly, the best autobiography written by a working-class militant active in the 1940's is Matthew Ward's remarkable story *INDIGNANT HEART* (New York: New Books, 1952, out of print). Ward (a pseudonym for Charles Denby) passed through both the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party, and he offers trenchant criticism of both from the point of view of a black militant. Ward also offers a good critique of Walter Reuther and the UAW leadership from a rank-and-file perspective — a chapter of which has been reprinted in Staughton Lynd, ed., *AMERICAN LABOR*

RADICALISM (New York : Wiley, 1973). This perspective is also contained in a less detailed account by James Boggs, THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: PAGES FROM A NEGRO WORKER'S NOTEBOOK (New York: Monthly Review paperback, 1963), Chapter 1. Philip Foner's general history ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE BLACK WORKER, 1619-1973 (New York : Praeger, 1974) contains first-rate chapters on blacks and unions during the 1940's, although it lacks the insight into the social relations of the period provided by Ward and Boggs. Given Foner's sympathy for the Communist Party, the author provides a fairly complete account of why the CP "lost prestige" among black workers. Foner is justified in praising the CIO, and especially the Communist-led unions therein, for their progressive record on race relations in the 1940's. But by constantly comparing the CIO to the overtly racist AFL unions, the author misses some of the problems in the CIO's actions with regard to black workers. A more critical analysis of the CIO is offered by Sumner Rosen, "The CIO Era, 1935-1955", in Julius Jacobsen, ed., THE NEGRO AND THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor paperback, 1968).

In sum, the historical accounts of black workers in the 1940's tend to ignore the special history of the masses in favor of institutional commentary about unions, government agencies (like the short-lived Fair Employment Practices Commission), or organized protests, like the March on Washington (all covered admirably in Herbert Garfinkel's WHEN NEGROES MARCH (New York : Atheneum paperback, 1959); but there is still much more information available about Afro-American workers during and after the Second World War than there is about women workers, who also entered the labor force in great numbers after Pearl Harbor. There is no lack of documentary evidence about women workers in the war. In fact, the two accounts written by female shipyard workers which appear in this issue will be published along with other documentary materials about wartime women workers in the new anthology being edited by Roz Baxandall, Linda Gordon, and Susan Reverby. At this point, the most useful synthesis of women's labor history during the war is William H. Chafe, THE AMERICAN WOMAN: HER CHANGING SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND PO-

LITICAL ROLES, 1920-1970 (New York: Oxford University Press paperback 1972), Part 2, which tends to exaggerate the changes that affected women in the 1940's. A more detailed analysis can be found in Chester W. Gregory, WOMEN IN DEFENSE WORK DURING WORLD WAR II (New York: Exposition, 1974), which contains a useful chapter on black women.

At this point the most insightful books about the wrenching social and economic changes affecting workers during the war are two novels which depict in some detail the role of women in the community and the shop during the 1940's. These are Harriette Arnow's excellent story of Appalachian poor whites in wartime Detroit, THE DOLLMAKER (New York: Avon paperback, 1954), and K. B. Gilden's BETWEEN THE HILLS AND THE SEA (New York: Random House, 1971, out of print), which captures the exhilaration of the 1946 strike wave in an Eastern industrial city (probably Bridgeport), the subsequent purge of the left in the union (probably UE), and the guerrilla warfare on the shop floor against the company (undoubtedly GE). The fact that books like BETWEEN THE HILLS AND THE SEA and Matthew Ward's autobiography are out of print accounts for some of the gaps in our knowledge of the 1940's, but this essay argues that there are other important reasons for the existence of these gaps. This special issue of RADICAL AMERICA should provide much more information about rank-and-file workers than there is in the existing literature, but clearly a need still exists for more research from the bottom up and for more critical analysis of the important changes that affected workers during and after the Second World War.

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