5-2012

Solidarity Forever: The Story of the Flint Sit-Down Strike and the Communist Party from the Perspective of the Rank and File Autoworkers

Brandi Nicole McCloud
East Tennessee State University

Solidarity Forever: The Story of the Flint Sit-Down Strike and the Communist Party from the Perspective of the Rank and File Autoworkers

---

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of History

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in History

---

by

Brandi McCloud

May 2012

Dr. Emmett Essin, Chair

Dr. Henry Antkiewicz

Dr. Dale Schmitt

Keywords: autoworkers, Sit-Down Strike, Communist Party

ABSTRACT

Solidarity Forever: The Story of the Flint Sit-Down Strike and the Communist Party from the Perspective of the Rank and File Autoworkers

by

Brandi McCloud

The subject of this thesis is the Sit-Down Strike in Flint, Michigan in 1936-1937. The main purpose is to examine the story of the strike as told by the strikers themselves, to explore the role that Communists played in the strike along with how the workers responded the Communism and other political ideologies of the day. The final chapter then examines the many anti-Communist forces that surrounded the autoworkers before, during, and after the Sit-Down Strike, which may account for the strikers' reluctance to admit their affiliation with the Communists.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Essin, my Committee Chair, for his guidance throughout my Undergraduate and Graduate career at East Tennessee State University. Without his help, kindness, and constant encouragement, this thesis would not have been possible.

I also want to thank the entire History Department, especially those professors who helped me through my writing process. Without the generosity of the department that offered me my research grant, I would not have been able to travel to Detroit and Flint, Michigan to conduct my research.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Sit-Down Strike in Flint, Michigan in 1936-1937, a dynamic turning point in labor history, changed not only the auto industry but American industry as a whole. In the years since the strike, historians have scrutinized it in many different contexts, although rarely has it been the subject of an entire study. Perhaps the reason for this is because the strike is seen as an important part of a larger story in labor, the auto industry, the New Deal, and Communist history. To gain a clearer perspective of this momentous labor event, it is essential to look at the story of the strike and the unionization of General Motors through the eyes of the average workingmen who were involved in the strike, the rank and file autoworkers in Flint, Michigan. There are many things that we already know about the strike, the leaders, and the results, yet there is so little we know about the men who actually sat inside the factories and waged the battle against the industrial giant. This research will relate the strikers' story while also investigating where their political sympathies most likely laid and how the world around them before, during, and after the strike affected their lives and their memories of the strike.

The most vital resource for much of this thesis came as a result of the Labor History Project at the University of Michigan, Flint. During the 1970s and 1980s historian Neil Leighton spearheaded an effort to collect and preserve interviews conducted with strike participants. The interviews give the best account of the strike and cannot be ignored when writing about the event. Leighton later wrote that he embarked on the project because the histories of the strike that have been written did not cover the local experience. "Most accounts of the strike were produced by white, middle-class, male professions…even if sympathetic to the striker's cause,

they did not work in the plant, were not residents of Flint, and often had their own ideological or political axes to grind."[1]

The story of the strike, the struggle of the workers, and the truth that lay behind all of the histories that have been written intrigued me from early on in my studies. I myself am a native of Flint, my father retired after thirty years inside the GM factories, which are also filled with my uncles, aunts, cousins, and friends. Most interesting to me was the fact that both of my Grandfathers worked for GM at the time of the Sit-Down Strike and both participated in some capacity. My maternal Grandfather, Russell Hayes, was inside Chevy #4 and has his name on the strike monument in Flint. My paternal Grandfather, James Harrington, worked for AC/Delco at the time and, although that particular plant was not involved in the strike, he was a picket around the struck plants while he was not working. In writing this thesis I had to confront and deal with my own family's memories and ideas that swirled around the strike, and as a Flint native I also had to overcome the bias toward the UAW that I was raised on. However difficult I may have thought that would be, it turned out that the truth that I found did not make the strikers or their actions (including my own grandfathers') any less heroic, nor did the idea that they may have been sympathetic toward Communists tarnish the memory of their actions. In fact, knowing and understanding the truth, not only about the strike itself but also about the city of Flint, the politics of the day, the working conditions the workers faced, and the prejudices waged against them, all made me appreciate the Sit-Down Strike even more.

There has been much written on the strike over the years, and the most generally recognized work was done by historian Sidney Fine in 1969 entitled *Sit-Down*.[2] Fine conducted

[1] Shaun S. Nethercott and Neil O. Leighton, "Memory, Process, and Performance," *The Oral History Review,* 18, no. 2 (Autumn, 1990): 44.

[2] Sidney Fine, *Sit-Down: The General Motors Strike of 1936-1937* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1960).

interviews with some of the strike participants, but his book predated the interviews from the Labor History Project. Fine also took a sweeping view of the strike itself, looking at General Motors, the history of Flint, and the formation of the union. Fine also had written a lengthy three volume biography on Governor Frank Murphy, who was the governor of Michigan during the Sit-Down Strike. While most would agree that having Governor Murphy in Lansing at the time of the strike was helpful to the union, in truth, Fine gave Murphy a lot of credit for the victory in Flint, which is exaggerated. William Weinstone, who was head of the Communist Party in Michigan during the strike, stressed after Fine's book was released that "Murphy did not evacuate the workers because of their militancy and its leadership."[3] Many of those involved in the strike, like Weinstone, believed that Murphy acted in reaction to the situation, not as much heroically himself, but with his own political salvation in mind, avoiding blood on his own hands.

Fine also tended to brush over the political and social upheaval occurring in Flint before, during, and after the strike, not giving too much attention to the political leanings of the rank and file workers, let alone the leaders of the strike. An unflattering book review in *The Nation* stated that "It is a superficial work which does not analyze the class forces in the country and the strike," identifying the fact that Fine ignored the ideological underpinnings of the strike movement itself.[4] Fine also failed to address the political leanings of certain key players in the strike and gave small mention of important people, such as Maurice Sugar, who was one of the key UAW lawyers in Detroit who worked behind the scenes of the strike and who also was part of the left-wing. Sugar identified this slight himself in a letter that he wrote after Fine's book was released that he was not surprised "that the leaflet which advertises Fine's book *Sit-Down*

[3] William Weinston, interviewed by Nan Pendrall and Neil Leighton, 15 March 1979, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.

[4] Weinstone, interview.

omits my name. Who was I anyway!"[5] Sugar had every right to feel that his omission was an error, he was the force behind the scenes in the negotiations, and he also authored much of the UAW music that came out of the strike and that spurred the participants on, such as his song "Sit-Down!" which was sung by many of the men inside. Perhaps this focus on politics was not the goal of Fine's work, but it left a hole in the story that needs to be filled.

Many of the other accounts of the strike were written as part of a larger body of work, usually focusing on labor history, the auto industry, or the history of the UAW. Most of these accounts came after Fine's work and they used and cited him almost exclusively, making their view and account of the strike very similar to his.[6] Others who have written on the strike included those who were either directly involved in the leadership of the strike or had a vested interest in the view of the union and the UAW, either negatively or positively. These accounts, while interesting to read and take into consideration, were obviously biased, whether skewed by personal visions of heroism, self proclamation about the power of unionization, or prejudiced by the politics of the Cold War.[7]

There are also a number of works that addressed the issue of politics in the formation of not only the auto union but in industrial union formation in general. Roger Keeran wrote an important article in 1979, and later a book in 1980, about the impact of the Communist Party on the auto unions. Keeran did extensive research and looked at the auto union's growth from

---

[5] Letter to friends Carl and Lucy, 2 July 1970, Maurice Sugar Collection, Box 25, Folder 4, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

[6] See: Steve Babson, *The Unfinished Struggle: Turning Points in American Labor, 1877-Present* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999); John Barnard, *American Vanguard: The United Auto Workers During the Reuther Years, 1935-1970* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004).

[7] See: Richard O. Boyer and Herbert M. Morais, *Labor's Untold Story* (New York: United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, 1955); Sol Dollinger and Genora Johnson Dollinger, *Not Automatic: Women and the Left in the Forging of the Auto Workers' Union* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000); Irving Howe and B.J. Widdick, *The UAW and Walter Reuther* (New York: Random House, 1949); "Parson Jack" Johnston, *Labor Dangers of the C.I.O. Movement* (Columbia, GA: Self Published, 1937); Sidney Lens, *Left, Right and Center: Conflicting Forces in American Labor* (H. Regnery Co., 1949); Edward Levinson, *Labor on the March* (1938, Reprint New York: University Books, 1956).

infancy and how the leadership was always entwined with the Communists. Even though Keeran did write some about the Sit-Down Strike, he focused on the leaders, who were known Communists, and did not look very closely at the rank and file workers in Flint. His book mostly focused on what was happening in Detroit outside of the Sit-Down Strike and looked very little at the activities and political culture of Flint and its workers. Others who have written on the Communist involvement in the labor movement also tended to focus on Detroit and ignore Flint itself, while having a definite slant either for Communism (because they were members of the Party) or against it.[8] For this reason, it is important to look at how the politics of the day could have affected the men working for GM in Flint during the 1930s.

Much of the history of the strike is mired in the preconceived notions of Communism that developed in America soon after the Bolshevik Revolution. These misconceptions only intensified after the Sit-Down Strike and into the Cold War. Many have downplayed the popularity of the Communist Party among the autoworkers because most of the strikers either denied any affiliation or refused to discuss it. The men all seemed to be hesitant to even associate anyone from the strike with Communism and events show they had good reason to withhold that information. The circumstances that surrounded the workers before, during, and after the Sit-Down strike would definitely have an effect on the workers and their collective memory. Not only did many have their lives threatened by vigilante groups such as the Black Legion and the Flint Alliance, but the UAW itself also began a strict policy of clearing Communists from their union roles soon after the strike was won. Even forty to fifty years after

[8] See: Roger Keeran, "Communist Influence in the Automobile Industry, 1920-1933: Paving the Way for an Industrial Union," *Labor History,* 20, no. 2 (1979); Roger Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers' Unions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980); William Z. Foster *History of the Communist Party of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1968).

the strike these men recognized the fact that any affiliation they may have had with the Communist Party was something that they needed and wanted to suppress.

The truth was that the Communist Party in America did not represent the threat to American Democracy in the way that most Americans feared. The Communists who worked in labor and with the autoworkers would have been pushing for the same things that all the other unions were: equality, better working conditions, fair pay, seniority, and union democracy. All of these objectives fell right in line with what the rank and file men were fighting for. The autoworkers were also largely ignored or mislead by other political groups or labor organizations such as the New Deal Democrats and the American Federation of Labor. The only group that listened to them and reached out to help them achieve their goal of an industrial union was the Communist Party.

There were many reasons why the autoworkers needed an ally and fought so hard for union representation in 1936. One of their reasons for striking had to do with wages. There is a lot of discrepancy about the exact amount that the men in Flint working for GM made in 1936. Different sources claim different amounts. What the sources all confirm, however, is that it was not enough for the working man to sustain a living, provide for his family, and in most cases, the autoworkers in Flint during the depression lived under very harsh conditions. As historian John Barnard stated "The claim that the auto workers had risen to middle-class levels of comfort, convenience, and consumption by the end of the 'prosperity decade' is more myth than reality."[9]

Housing the autoworkers in Flint had always been an issue for the auto giants, as the city outgrew itself quickly with the great influx of migrant workers. In 1910, as Ford was recruiting workers to come up from the south, Flint actually built a tent city to house the great number of incoming workers. At this time, they were mostly men who were either single, or who would

[9] Barnard, 27; Dollinger, 123-124; Fine, 61.

work and then visit their families in the south. By the 1930s, however, these migrant workers had established roots in Flint, and had brought or acquired families in the area. Most of them lived with their families in small, unheated shacks, and those who had a decent home could not afford to buy it. As a majority of the strikers indicated in their interviews, they were forced to rent.[10]

GM always publicized that they offered some of the highest wages in industry during the Great Depression. While in many ways this claim was true, there were so many things that affected the actual yearly income of the autoworker. Most of the autoworkers did not work year round, as the plants were subject to close with any slowdown, any break down of equipment, and most notably, each factory had a time during the year where it had to shut down completely (usually for months at a time) to switch over the whole line for the next year's models.[11]

The workers were also subject to arbitrary lay-offs, as the factories were managed and run by local foremen who made the decision about who worked each day. Many strikers told stories about losing their jobs for the summer to a foreman's son who had come home from college and needed a job. During the depression especially, when work in Flint was so scarce, many men would show up each day, whether they were told to work or not, and they would wait on the front lawn to be called in to work for a couple of hours. When the line went down because of a mechanical breakage, the men would have to stay and wait for the line to come back up, and while they had 'down-time' they were no longer on the clock. The workers stood there for hours on end, waiting just to have the chance to work and get paid.[12]

---

[10] Dollinger, 123; Fine, 61, 102; Striker Interviews, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.

[11] Fine, 27; the auto factories still have yearly shut-downs due to change-over, as the daughter of a GM employee, I know that every July my dad got two weeks of vacation since now the changeover can be done much quicker.

[12] Dollinger, 124; Barnard, 27.

Another part of the wage system that hurt the autoworkers was the piece-rate system that existed in Flint. This was a way to 'reward' production on the line by paying everyone a flat rate of pay and then giving them an incentive piece-rate earned on each piece produced. While this may seem like a great way for GM to reward the hard workers, it was not easily constructed, and overall GM made it so difficult to understand that most men had no idea what they were making or how much they were losing using this new system. When you coupled this system with the dreaded 'speed-up,' which was listed among one of the most important reasons for the Sit-Down Strike, you can understand why the piece-rate system did not work. [13]

The speed-up of the line was another way for GM (and the other auto manufacturers) to get more production out of fewer workers. Basically the foremen would do time trials with the men, see how much they could produce in an hour, and then set a quota above that as incentive to make them work more. The foremen would then set the speed of the line's movement based on this quota. This created conditions that most autoworkers were unable to keep up with on a regular day-to-day basis. Strikers remembered coming home with arms so sore they could not even sit up at the table and eat, while others ended up in insane asylums, having cracked under the constant pressure to keep up. During the depression, with so many men out of work and a crowd of men in front of the factory waiting for a chance to come in and work a few hours, few men had the courage to stop the line, slow it down, or even complain. A common thread through all of the striker interviews was their memory of the foremen at one point or another taking them or a fellow worker over to the window and showing them the crowd of men waiting to take their spot on the line, who would not complain about the speed of the work. For men trying to feed their families, this was enough incentive to stay on the line and endure the punishment. There is a story handed down in my family about my grandfather who had worked for Ford before going

[13] Fine, 62.

to work for GM during the strike. The reason that he left Ford was because he was denied a bathroom break and was told by his foreman to 'go where he stood.' Genora Johnson Dollinger stated in her book that "they used to say, 'Once you pass the gates of General Motors, forget about the United States Constitution.'"[14]

The auto barons themselves did not have much respect for the autoworkers, in many cases they viewed them as an expendable commodity that could easily and often be replaced. This was evident in their lack of any type of seniority system, dismissing men on a daily basis. Henry Ford himself once said that the autoworkers "must be skilled in exactly one operation which the most stupid man can learn within two days…I could not possibly do the same thing day in and day out, but to other minds, perhaps I might say to the majority of minds, repetitive operations hold no terrors. In fact, to some types of mind thought is absolutely appalling…the average worker, I am sorry to say…above all…wants a job in which he does not have to think."[15]

The idea that the autoworker was, at best, simple-minded, helped the auto manufacturers to excuse some of their more underhanded practices which they used to not only control their worker, but to keep them from organizing a union. The auto barons, such as Ford and GM, made it their mission to keep unions out of the industry, even forming an Employers' Association in Detroit which provided scabs to work in plants during strikes, and most notably offered spies to infiltrate the plants and the unions to compile lists of union men and Communists. Between 1934 and July of 1936 GM reportedly spent one million dollars on labor spies through the Pinkerton National Detective Agency. The LaFollette Committee also found that by the summer of 1936 three of thirteen board members of the AFL union in Flint were recruited worker spies

[14] Dollinger, 125; Interviews.
[15] Barnard, 18.

for GM, while two more were actually hired Pinkertons. Under these conditions it is not hard to understand why no one trusted the AFL union in Flint, or even dared to talk about unionization.[16]

There were many other problems that the workers in Flint, specifically, had to deal with. All of which stemmed from the fact that because Flint was built around one industry, and mostly one manufacturer, GM, it was a company owned and run town. The city officials in Flint were all associated with the company. For example, Chief of police James V. Wills had been a Buick detective, and the mayor himself, Harold Bradshaw, had also worked for the company. Most of the judges and the county prosecutor all owned stock in GM, making their opinions against strikes and the workers very biased. Nearly eighty percent of the families in Flint relied on GM for their income, in one form or another. The city itself depended on the running of the plants and the employment of the workers. GM also had control of the radio stations, the newspaper, and all media outlets in the city, denying the union access to their resources.[17]

Above all else, by 1936 the workers were fighting for true collective bargaining. GM would not deal with the workers as a whole unit, nor on a national scale. Their primary argument during any strike would be that each plant was managed locally, and therefore each grievance must be settled with local negotiations. Companies like GM saw the danger in letting the autoworkers organize on a national level, they understood the amount of power this would give to the collective workers, which was why they fought so hard against it. This was also why the union decided to strike in Flint and cause a national shut-down. They hoped that this would force GM to negotiate with them on the national level as a collective group. While the union did eventually acquire exclusive collective bargaining rights, they did not come directly after the Sit-Down Strike, but as a result a while later. The UAW did, however, force GM to negotiate with

[16] Barnard, 30; Fine, 38, 39, 41.
[17] Fine, 108, 106.

them as a collective group of factories that went on strike, and this would lead to an expansion on the national level.

The workers and UAW leaders in Flint would face many challenges in the days leading up to the strike and all during the strike. Yet, most would agree that their actions were necessary and that the strike had to come to a place like Flint, where GM was king. Not only were the factories in Flint vital parts of GM's operation, but also a victory here would show a symbolic weakening of the auto giant. The Sit-Down Strike still lives on in Flint, its legacy sometimes overshadowing its own importance. There is a large monument to the strike behind the UAW local, and each year on February 11 the men in the factories still wear a white shirt to commemorate the end of the strike. Rarely can you pick up a copy of the shop paper in Flint and not see an article or blurb that is dedicated to some aspect of the Sit-Down Strike. It has become a part of Flint, even as the auto giants have pulled up stakes and moved out of the area, leaving vast amounts of people out of work, with nothing to see but vacant factories which once housed the city's heroes.

This study is not intended to tarnish that memory but to enhance it by understanding the strike itself through the eyes of the average worker. It explores the men's views and memories of the strike itself, followed by their history and association with different political groups. Finally it confirms the challenges the men faced as union men and the prejudice they faced for their affiliation with left-wing groups, such as the Communist Party. In the end it is easier to see not only what the autoworkers in Flint went through before, during, and after the Sit-Down strike but to also understand how their experiences shaped their political beliefs and how they remembered their own affiliations once the strike was over. Overall, it is clear that the men as a group had little open hostility for the Communist leaders of the strike, and because the

Communists were the only group listening to the rank and file workers and helping them unionize their industry, there is a strong likelihood that many secretly supported or sympathized with the Communist Party during the strike. This information was only muted and suppressed by the workers because of the dangers and prejudice that surrounded the idea of Communism in America during the 1930s and later on.

CHAPTER 2

THE STORY OF THE SIT-DOWN STRIKE

"Why must men in the world's most perfect Democracy have to take such steps to survive?"[18] These were the words of Fisher Body #2 Sit-Down striker Francis O'Rourke, who kept a detailed diary during the Flint Sit-Down Strike. O'Rourke told one of the only firsthand accounts of what occurred during the forty-four days of the strike, and he detailed in it how he and the other men felt and how they passed their time inside the plant. In the 1970s, the Labor History Project at the University of Michigan in Flint conducted interviews with strike participants. These interviews with elderly people forty years removed from the event are very important to understanding the actual events of the strike as remembered by those who lived it day by day. While time may have made some of the details fuzzy, the participants had retold this saga many times over forty years. For most it was the most exciting and important time in their life.

The story of a strike itself is always tricky to decipher. One must look at each person's perspective, which side of the fight they were on, and what were their political affiliations. One other factor that seems to have clouded the memory of some of the participants had to do with a vision of personal triumph and heroism. Many of these men and women lived the rest of their lives basking in the glory of the events in Flint that winter, while many others may remember that individual's part as being somewhat small and insignificant. All of these factors definitely had an effect on the men and women who recalled the strike and the story they told. It is still very important when studying the history of the Sit-Down Strike to use the memories of the

[18] Francis O'Rourke Diary, 12-31-36, Box 1, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.

participants themselves because they have a different understanding and recollection of events than the people who witnessed the strike as an outsider.

The Sit-Down Strike officially began in Flint the morning of 30 December 1936 in the Fisher Body Plant known at the time as Fisher Body #2. The men arrived at work that morning around six a.m., just as any other day. Francis O'Rourke noted that at seven a.m., there was mass chaos, and men were hollering and screaming about shutting the line down, which all seemed to surprise the men. He later shared the information that the foreman had told three inspectors to remove their union buttons or be fired, claiming that they were in training for management, and therefore could not have union affiliation. When the inspectors refused, the foreman fired them. This prompted the union leaders in the shop to yell for the men to shut the line down and stay put.[19]

Men who were identified as being the leaders of the initial strike movement in Fisher Body #2 that morning were Maynard "Red" Mundale and Bruce Manley. Other men who were perhaps greatly involved with the union movement at the time, such as William T. Connolly, remembered that the union had really pre-planned the strike itself. Mundale stated that they knew that Fisher Body #2 was union strong; he believed they were eighty percent organized by 30 December. Therefore, the night before the strike the union held a meeting at the Pengelly Building (United Auto Workers or UAW headquarters in Flint) where Robert Travis, UAW organizer in Flint at the time of the strike, told the union men that a factory in Cleveland had just sat down and "the iron was hot". In other words, Mundale believed that the UAW was telling them to take Fisher Body #2 down. They all voted to wear their union buttons into work the next morning. They knew that this would create some kind of disturbance in the plant, which would

[19] Francis O'Rourke Diary, 12-30-36; Fred Ahearn, interviewed by John DeYonker, July 1978, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.

allow them the opportunity to call the strike and sit down. This idea of pre-planned action is collaborated in the account told by other Fisher Body #2 workers, such as Fred Ahearn and Elmer "Red" MacAlpine. A strike was looming and it seemed very evident that the conditions were right. When Travis questioned Bud Simons, the leader of the strike in Fisher Body #1, about whether or not the men in Flint were ready for a strike, Simons replied, "they're like a pregnant woman in her tenth month."[20] The average man, union or not, could probably sense the tension building in the factories. Union leaders, such as Mundale, would have known about plans initiated to light the spark that started the fire. There is a question that seems to remain in regards to how planned the Sit-Down actually was. Many of the men who participated probably had no prior knowledge of the plan, yet union leaders may have planned to wear their union buttons on that day, hoping to kick-start their plan for a strike into action.[21]

Once the strike began, there was no stopping the men. Connolly and Mundale both recalled that management immediately requested that the men send two representatives to the employment office to meet with the plant manager. The men sent Mundale and Manley as their representatives, and Mundale claimed that the two men sat in the office and waited quite a long time for the plant manager to arrive. As they sat there, they soon realized that not only was the plant manager not coming, but plant security guards were gathering in the hallway right outside the door, waiting to come in and force the leaders out of the building, hoping to end the strike.

[20] Henry and Dorothy Kraus, interviewed by Neil Leighton, William J. Meyer, 5 May 1982, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.

[21] Fred Ahearn interview; William T. Connolly, interviewed by Neil Leighton, 4 March 1980, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.; Elmer "Red" MacAlpine, interviewed by William Meyer, 2 July 1980, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.; Maynard "Red" Mundale, interviewed by Neil Leighton, 22 July 1980, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.

The two men quickly forced their way out and back into the plant with the rest of the union men.[22]

From all accounts, the beginning of the Sit-Down Strike in Fisher Body #2 was frantic and chaotic, with some men not quite understanding what they should be doing or what was going to happen. Connolly and Mundale stated that union leaders in the plant immediately held a meeting and that the men voted to stay in. Sit-Down Strikes before theirs, such as in Atlanta, had only lasted over night, so it is plausible to believe that some men expected to be leaving in the morning. O'Rourke's account in his diary from 1 January described the men as "drawn, pale, tired, and anxious." He lamented that day that he hoped the end was in sight, indicating that the men did not anticipate staying inside for forty-four days.[23]

Distinctly different versions exist of the union organizing the strike in Fisher Body #2 after the strike came. Mundale claimed that the union did not assist and that neither Travis nor the Reuther brothers gave them instructions of any kind; that the 250-300 men inside Fisher Body #2 who initiated the strike figured out how to organize themselves on their own.[24] Travis and Charlie Killinger remembered things differently, claiming that at midnight the first night of the Sit-Down Strike the union leaders held a secret meeting in which UAW leaders gave the men instructions on how to organize and conduct the strike in each plant. The reason that this may be denied or conveniently left out of Mundale's account is because Travis and Killinger, who themselves were members of the Communist Party at the time, claimed that the instructions were compiled for the men by William Weinstone, head of the Communist Party in Michigan. Mundale himself was not a communist and repeatedly claimed that Fisher Body #2 was not a

[22] William T. Connolly, interview; "Red" Mundale, interview.
[23] William T. Connolly, interview; "Red" Mundale, interview; Francis O'Rourke 1-1-37.
[24] NYT article claims that only 50 men sat down in FB#2. " 'Sit Downs' Four Big Plants of General Motors," *New York Times,* Dec 31, 1936, 1:8.

radically led plant, the men, he claimed did not receive support from Travis or the union very much throughout the strike. Bud Simons, who was also a member of the Communist Party, retold the same story as Travis and Killinger, claiming that the strike leaders of each plant received instructions from the union on how to organize the strike. These accounts are prime examples of how personal politics created discrepancies, making it difficult to know which version is the truth. It seems logical that the union and therefore the Communist Party organizers would have given instructions for organization since it would have been a large task for an inexperienced working man to organize three hundred men living in a factory for forty-four days.[25]

Fisher Body #2 may have the distinction of being the first plant in Flint to sit-down, but it was not the only one. Around ten p.m. on the night of 30 December, Fisher Body #1 joined the strike. The majority of the men interviewed stated that they knew about the strike before it came to Fisher Body #1, that it was not a spontaneous event. The leaders of the strike and of the union men in Fisher Body #1 claimed that the union was stronger in this plant than any other plant in Flint. Robert Travis himself was in charge of the union drive in Fisher Body #1 and worked closely with the union leader inside the plant, Bud Simons. Fisher Body #1 was also home to strike experienced men who had been involved in union strikes in Flint and other cities in Michigan since the late 1920s. All of these factors suggest that perhaps the union had expected Fisher Body #1 to go out on strike before Fisher Body #2 did so that morning, thinking that Fisher Body #1 was more prepared to strike. That would account for the men in Fisher Body #1 claiming to have known about the strike days, even weeks in advance, while even the leaders in Fisher Body #2 claimed to only hear about striking the night before.

[25] "Red" Mundale, interview; Robert Travis and Charlie Killinger, interviewed by Neil Leighton, 13 December 1978, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.; Bud Simons, interviewed by Neil Leighton, 27 December 1978, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.

The majority of the men from Fisher Body #1 knew in advance of the coming strike. Even those not deeply involved in union affairs, such as Cecil Hendricks and Louis Gancsos, Sr., stated that they knew that it was coming that night through plant rumors. Bud Simons gave a clear picture of why the union felt that Fisher Body #1 had to go on strike that night, even before Fisher Body #2 had gone down. Two glass factories (the Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Company and the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company) which supplied all glass for GM vehicles were conducting a strike and both already had been out for quite some time.[26] The union leaders knew that these particular factories were the suppliers for GM vehicles and that in the near future GM was going to run out of glass and would have to close their shops in Flint and lay off workers. If this happened, the UAW would have missed its opportunity to strike and cripple a working GM facility in Flint.[27] According to Simons, for that reason, union leaders made the decision to take Fisher Body #1 down that evening, but they needed a plan in order to convince the men inside and to inspire them to sit in. Simons claimed that the leaders decided that another union man from Fisher Body #1 named Bert Harris would enter the union hall in front of the men, when union leaders called them together for a special meeting during their dinner break around nine p.m. that evening. Harris was to announce that GM was planning to remove the dies (the essential molds used to make the car parts) from Fisher Body #1 to a factory outside of Flint in light of recent strike events at Fisher Body #2. That would have been a critical move for GM, and would have made any strike at Fisher Body #1 ineffective because GM would have had the essential tools to restart production at another location. When Bert Harris announced this, the

[26]"Sit Downs' Close Four Big Plants of General Motors," GM and the NYT collaborate the story that within the first two weeks of 1937 GM would have run out of glass and would have to shut down factories if that strike was not settled.

[27] Carl Haessler, "Behind the Auto Strike," *New Masses,* 2 February 1937, 5. He tells of how hard the UAW worked to resolve the glass strike so that GMs competitors would be back to work without GM.; "Labor: Automobile Armageddon," *Time Magazine* 18 January 1937, also supports the claim that the glass strike would have shut down GM soon.

men all voted to conduct a sit-down upon returning from dinner at Fisher Body #1. There are many still associated with the strike, including Bert Harris, along with other strikers from Fisher Body #1 who contend that GM was in fact moving the dies out of the factory that evening. Harris contended that he in fact called the strike at Fisher Body #1 by his disclosure to union leaders that GM was moving the dies out of Flint. Some may attribute this discrepancy to the fact that Harris was very clear on the fact that he was against the Communist Party and any union leader who may have been affiliated with the CP, such as Simons. Many concluded that Bert Harris was also a member of the Black Legion during the time of the strike, which was an anti Communist vigilante group. It may also be an example of Harris's heroic view of himself and his participation in the strike many years later. Explanations from strike leaders, such as Simons, and GM denying that they were planning to move the dies, shed doubt on the assertion that GM was planning to remove the dies from the factory that night.[28]

Regardless the beginning, the strike at Fisher Body #1 had immediate effects. Striker Elden Coale declared that he was not even at work on second shift that evening but was at the union hall waiting for a signal from the men after dinner. Once the union leaders knew that the men had taken the factory, first shift workers such as Coale flooded to the factory and climbed in through the windows to join their comrades. GM also felt the effects of the strikes in Flint immediately. Other factories began to shut down because of lack of parts as early as the very next day. For the men inside, waking up the next morning in the factory brought a sobering

[28] Louis Gancsos, Sr., interviewed by William Meyer, 5 March 1980, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.; Cecil Hendricks, interviewed by Kenneth West, 17 April 1980, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.; Bud Simons, interview; Hugh Albert "Bert" Harris, interviewed by Neil Leighton, 22 August 1979, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.; Ken Malone, interviewed by Henry Kraus and Neil Leighton, 29 July 1986, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.; Charles Killinger, interviewed by Neil Leighton, 6 August 1979, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.; "Labor: Strike-of-the-Week," *Time Magazine,* December 21, 1936; Fine, 145.

reality. O'Rourke expressed the heartache of this reality in his daily diary entry as he wondered how his family felt about welcoming friends to their New Years Eve party without him. He lamented, "What will happen today? I hope it will be over."[29]

One of the first things that the men ordered, within the first few hours, was that all the women leave the plant. Both factories had female employees who worked in the cutting and sewing rooms. Although some men asserted that these women were hard workers and even strong union participants who would have stayed and fought alongside the men, none of the men believed that it would be proper for the women to stay inside the factories. Some of the women were married and mothers, while most of the men were married and fathers. Most wives would have never supported their husbands sitting in a factory with women because it was hard enough for a majority of the men to convince their wives that this was a noble cause and that they were not in there boozing and womanizing.[30]

By 2 January, reality was setting in, and so was a sort of routine. On the inside, the men began to realize that their time inside the factories may not be as short lived as they had hoped. They began to form committees, which gave each man a task or job to perform, whether it was to provide the men with a shave and haircut or patrol the factory as a patrolman. They established rules of conduct and even formed a kangaroo court that held trials against offenders of the rules. Offenses that could have gotten you brought before the court included drinking alcohol, damaging machinery, being disrespectful of others, or shirking your assigned duties. Punishments often included cleaning a specific part of the factory or in a severe case, the leaders would remove you from the factory.[31]

---

[29] Francis O'Rourke, diary; Elden Coale, interviewed by William Meyer and Neil Leighton, 24 March 1980, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.

[30] William T. Connolly, interview; " 'Sit Downs' Close Four Big Plants of General Motors."

[31] Cecil Hendricks, interview; Elden Coale, interview.

The men inside were quick to judge those they suspected might interfere with their strike or be spying on them for GM. Cloyse Crane was a striker in Fisher Body #2 who happened to be a line inspector and had been a member of the union for six months prior to the sit down. He recalled that he stayed inside with the men after the strike occurred, but after three days he was called before the kangaroo court and ordered to leave the shop because he was too close to management and a company man and they were afraid of where his loyalties might lie. It may seem ironic that an inspector, which was the position of the three union men fired that sparked the strike, might be suspected of treachery by the men. However, when examining the past in regards to union infiltration by GM spies and Pinkerton agents, it is easy to understand why the men had misgivings. Crane himself admitted to no hard feelings and stated that he left and went to union headquarters to see how he could help from the outside. He brought the men food and worked the pickets through the rest of the strike.[32]

The reason that the inside perspective of the men is so important in contrast to the reports of those on the outside is because there are details we get only from those who were inside the plant. One such detail of everyday life inside revolved around the issue of whether or not the men were able to leave the factory or have visitors come to them. The men inside almost all tell stories of leaving the factory through windows, climbing down fire escapes, jumping over barbed wire fences, or running three blocks in the middle of the night. Their reasons for leaving varied from homesickness, to family emergency, or even boredom. Ahearn, at Fisher Body #2, recounted how he left the plant for two days because he had gotten word that his wife and child had been evicted, while Connolly explained that he left about twice a week just to get out of the factory and break up the monotony. Cecil Hendricks explained that many men, like himself,

[32] Cloyse Crane, interviewed by Neil Leighton, 27 February 1980, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.

were sent out by the union on specific jobs for days at a time and then allowed to reenter the factory. The system that was set up involved the strike leaders issuing a strike identification card to each man and a pass that allowed them to go in and out of the factory. The union leaders thought they could control who was coming in by checking the identification of each man. Not all men were simply trying to get out; some were trying to get in even though they were not workers at that particular factory. Andrew Havrilla, who was a worker at Chevy #4, which did not go on strike until 1 February, recalled one such story. Havrilla declared that he would go and sneak into the Fisher plants during the month of January to provide relief for men who might have needed to go home or attend to personal business. Such details of the strike were only known by the men inside who actually participated in the strike.[33]

There is also an area of distinct discrepancy in the story told by the men inside and that of GM or city authorities, which has to do with the destruction of property inside the factories during the Sit-Down Strike. The men claimed that one of the most important things to them was to protect the machinery and keep the factory itself clean. Connolly explained that his job inside the factory was to patrol, much like a guard. Part of his job was to make sure that there was no one who was not supposed to be there inside the factory, to watch for any disturbances, but most importantly to make sure that the men were not damaging the property and were keeping their area clean.[34]

The reason that the men realized that it was so important to keep the machines oiled and in good working order was so that once the strike ended, they could return to work as soon as possible. They also understood that they had an important stake in the factory and they took

[33] Fred Ahearn, interview; William T. Connolly, interview; Andrew Havrilla, interviewed by Kenneth West, 4 April 1980, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.; Cecil Hendricks, interview; Elden Coale, interview.

[34] William T. Connolly, interview.

pride in its well-being. While the men admitted there were a few bad apples who did do minor damage to property, overall the strike leaders dealt with these radicals because the men approached the strike in a very businesslike manner. O'Rourke related in his diary that when the Sheriff came and read the injunction to them on 2 January that he was not even aware of the fact that what they were doing was illegal, that they felt they had just as much right to be on the property as the owners did.[35]

GM later painted the men and their attitude toward the factory in a much different light when they reported to Congress that Fisher Body #1 "was a scene of wanton destruction, filth and disruption that required many days of maintenance work…".[36] While the men inside the plant and union leaders admitted to some of the claimed destruction, such as the welding shut of doors and the use of seat cushions for beds, most claims were denied. The welding shut of doors and the use of seat cushions, along with the destruction of leather cushions for the fashioning of blackjacks were viewed by most as acts of necessity. They had to protect themselves from invasion, and they needed a place to sleep. As far as wanton destruction of property for the sake of being destructive, the men vehemently denied such acts. GM, however, claimed that they destroyed the electrical system supplying power to the machinery, stopped up the toilets, cracked all the radiators, destroyed the lighting equipment and spit tobacco all over the floor.[37]

Governor Murphy's Labor Commissioner, George A. Krogstad, was one of the few who did tour one of the factories (Chevy #4), and when he reported back to Murphy on 9 February, he told a version very similar to that of the men inside the factories. "In going through, one of the

---

[35] William T. Connolly, interview; Francis O'Rourke 1-13-37.

[36] "Sit-Down: What's Happened in the Automobile Industry since Enactment of the National Labor Relations Act…As Told to Congress." Presented 27 June 1939 before Senate Committee on Education and Labor, by William Cronin, Secretary, Manufacturers Committee, Automobile Manufacturers Association, Flint Public Library.

[37] Cronin.

first things that struck me was that some of the machinery had been covered with canvass. Other machinery parts had been oiled or greased. I asked about this. He informed me that they have a crew of strikers whose job it was to protect the machinery."[38] Krogstad also described plates laying around with sand on them for the men to spit their chewing tobacco, and that they kept everything very clean and sterile, expressing that "these boys are taking their strike very, very seriously."[39]

Outside the factories the union was busy trying to organize supporters because without them the men inside did not stand a chance of survival. Across the street from the factories, Ray Cook owned a restaurant that the factory workers frequented on a daily basis. He decided that he would not be making any profit staying open now that the strike had closed the shops, so he allowed the union to come in and take over the restaurant, using the facilities as a kitchen to feed not only the men sitting down, but also the pickets who came every day. Travis found a chef in Detroit named Max Gazan, who was a union supporter, to come up and help plan the meals and run the kitchen. It was a huge operation, and many of the men's wives became involved with this part of the strike, not only volunteering their time to work in the kitchen, but even making food at home in their own kitchens and bringing it down. Dorothy Kraus, wife of Henry Kraus who edited the strike newspaper the *Flint Auto Worker* during the strike, was identified by Travis as doing much of the organizational work in regards to the women and the food preparation. Genora Johnson Dollinger, who was the wife of Kermit Johnson who helped to lead the strike efforts in Chevy #4, was also identified by many as helping to organize the women, although she

[38] Report by George Krogstad, Labor Commissioner to Frank Murphy, 9 February 1937, Frank Murphy Collection, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, Reel 108, 3. There were a few others who claimed to have witnessed conditions inside the factories during the strike, and their descriptions are similar to Krogstad, claiming the men were taking good care of the inside of the factories. See "We Sat Down with the Strikers and General Motors," *Mill and Factory,* 20 (February 1937): 42; Bruce Bliven, "Sitting Down in Flint," *The New Rebublic,* no. 89 (January 27, 1937): 377.

[39] Krogstad, 4.

contributed more to the Women's Emergency Brigade, which become important later in the strike.[40]

As the strike passed the New Year holiday, it was clear that the men might be inside the factories for a long time, and the union needed to find a way to gather resources to continue to support them. One necessity that the union had to deal with was the gathering of food. Most newspapers of the day, especially the *Flint Journal,* which was decidedly biased towards GM, made the public believe that it was the minority radicals in the factory who supported the strike, while the average citizen in Flint was against the strikers. However, many of the strikers described how businesses and farms in and around Flint came and donated food and supplies. Because Flint was a GM town, a lot of them donated anonymously. Many, however, were proud to support the workers, not only in support of their cause, but also because they understood that the auto workers were fighting for better wages, which would mean that in the end they would be able to purchase more goods. Once the strike was over, merchants who supported the strikers were betting that the men would remember them and be loyal to them, which is what happened in many instances. Once such merchant was the Hamady Brothers Grocery store, which donated food weekly to the cause, and remained a strong union promoted store in the Flint area for years after the strike.[41]

The union also needed money. The UAW was young and had recently broken with the larger American Federation of Labor (AFL) to join the also young Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO). In order to support the effort, other more left-wing unions from the CIO stepped up. Travis stated that the United Mine Workers Union donated ninety-thousand dollars,

[40] Henry and Dorothy Kraus, interview; Genora Johnson Dollinger, interviewed by Neil Leighton, Dan Kroger, Larry Jones, John DeYonker, Kenneth West, Jack Palmer, 22 September 1978, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI; Robert Travis and Charlie Killinger, interview.

[41] Fred Ahearn, interview; Robert Travis and Charlie Killinger, interview; Genora Johnson Dollinger, interview; Elmer "Red" MacAlpine, interview.

while United Electrical Workers and the Aluminum Workers Union also donated significantly smaller amounts. Travis also recalled that the union received both anonymous and open donations from wealthy individuals, even some who owned stock in GM, such as Mrs. Gifford Pinchot.[42]

The UAW also provided manpower support by bringing reinforcements into Flint from Detroit, Toledo, Saginaw, and Grand Rapids to man the picket lines. Travis appointed a man named Ed Cronk to organize what strikers came to call the Flying Squadrons, which became very important to the strike effort. This consisted of twenty-five to thirty cars that were always on call for whatever the union may need them to do. Assignments for the Squad ranged from picking up pickets and taking them to the factory with the lowest number of pickets to creating a roadblock to protect the men. This was especially important at the time because the Bus and Trolley workers in Flint were also on strike, meaning that transportation around the city was very limited.[43]

Perhaps one of the most important strike supporting tools was the UAW sound car, which was a new innovation and the men credited it as being a game changer for the union. A union leader, usually Roy, Victor or Walter Reuther, Travis, or Kraus, always operated the sound car. It was guarded at all times by men who rode on the running boards. The union used it to bolster the moral of the men inside the factories and give the men valuable information and updates on negotiations. During the Battle of the Running Bulls, which came later in the strike, the strike leaders used it to give instructions to the men fighting inside and out and also to bolster their courage and moral.[44]

[42] Robert Travis and Charlie Killinger, interview.
[43] Robert Travis and Charlie Killinger, interview.
[44] Genora Johnson Dollinger, interview; Robert Travis and Charlie Killinger, interview.

The union also helped to provide support for the strikers' families, who may have suffered the most during the Sit-Down Strike. The men were no longer drawing a paycheck of any kind, and unlike today, the UAW did not have a built-up strike fund in order to supplement the men's wages during a strike. Bills went unpaid, and the only ones at home to deal with problems were the women and the children. Most men did not earn high enough wages to put any money aside before the strike. Many of the men recognized the kindness and understanding of many people in the community during the strike. Fred Ahearn explained that his wife and child were evicted for nonpayment of rent. He left the plant for a few days to sort things out and said that he was able to convince his landlord to let them stay the remainder of the strike, if he promised to catch up on rent afterwards. This type of silent support from the community seemed to be more the norm, rather than the exception, as many men told similar stories. Grocers extended lines of credit and families were able to survive without welfare support during the beginning of the strike on little or no income at all. The union supplemented the communal charity by delivering coal to families in need and providing medical care as well. Travis was able to get a doctor to come up from Detroit and donate his time helping sick strikers and their families. Lorne Herrlich, who owned Herrlich Pharmacy in Flint, donated a total of sixty-thousand dollars worth of medicine to the strikers and their families. The only job that some volunteers had, such as MacAlpine, was going around to strike families' homes and making sure they had what they needed and trying to get them help if they needed it. This support was vital to the men inside the shops because most would have been unable to continue the strike if their family was in desperation on the outside.[45]

[45] Robert Travis and Charlie Killinger, interview; "Red" MacAlpine, interview; Norm Bully, interviewed by Kenneth West, 26 June 1980, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.

From the very beginning the UAW national officials entered the struggle by trying to persuade GM to negotiate with them on a national level, since now the strike involved two plants in Flint, five overall (two in Detroit and one in Indiana). Homer Martin, President of the UAW, sent a letter to William Knudsen, VP of GM, on 31 December requesting a meeting. Knudsen did not reply specifically to Martin's request but only answered that he received the request and would respond on 5 January. Probably the reason for GM's willingness to stall negotiations revolved around Judge Edward S. Black. On 2 January, the judge issued an injunction that ordered the men to evacuate the plants. GM felt certain that this injunction would force the UAW to order their men out of the factories.[46]

This certainty felt by GM management was very short lived thanks to the investigative skills of the UAW's Detroit lawyers Lee Pressman and Maurice Sugar, who discovered and announced that Judge Black in fact owned over three thousand shares in GM, valued at $219,900. Martin and the UAW not only made GM abandon their injunction from Judge Black, but they also requested that Judge Black be disbarred, making it a national issue.[47] When 5 January came, GM issued their usual strike response claiming that the union must negotiate with the local plant management. GM would not engage in any conference with the UAW at a national level or while the strikers still sat inside their facilities. At the same time Alfred P. Sloan, President of GM, placed a full-page advertisement in the *Flint Journal* against the Sit-Down strikers, and warned his employees that the UAW was trying to steal their livelihood.[48]

Inside the plants, the men went from feelings of fear to boredom and they tried to find endless ways to entertain themselves as the first week of the strike was winding down.

---

[46] "Sit-Downs' Close Four Big Plants of General Motors,"; "Labor: Automobile Armageddon".

[47]"Labor: Automobile Armageddon."

[48] "To all Employes of General Motors, Corporation," The Flint Labor Collection, Acc# 517, Box 1, Scrapbook, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

O'Rourke reported that the men made basketballs out of rags and hoops out of old pails, trying to pass the time. By 5 January, however, O'Rourke claimed that the men inside had heard news of the formation of the Flint Alliance, which he expressed started rumors that this group of anti-strike vigilantes would rush, bombard, and haul the men out of the factories. He also described how men began to give up, leaving the factories to return home, either out of fear or pressure from their families.[49]

The Flint Alliance was a group that business professionals, city officials, and GM management formed outside of the factories during the Sit-Down Strike to contest the actions of the union. The group was led by George E. Boysen, who was a leader in the business community and had been on Buick's payroll and who also went to work for GM after the strike. The Flint Alliance promoted itself to the media and the nation as a grass-roots movement started by the employees of GM and other Flint citizens who were against the Sit-Down Strike and the radical actions of the UAW. They had petitions that were signed by supporters, which they sent on to Governor Murphy, as proof that, as they claimed, eighty-two percent of the population in Flint was against the strike.[50]

The UAW and the men inside the factories knew, however, that the Flint Alliance was not what it appeared to be, and was in fact a group that GM and large business leaders in the community funded. In truth, the petitions themselves contained forced signatures, with many of the employees in plants that were still in operation being forced by their foremen to sign or face termination.[51]

---

[49] O'Rourke 1-4-37, 1-5-37.

[50] "The Flint Alliance: Was it a GM Front or a Grass-Roots Opposition to Sit-Down," *The Flint Journal,* 1-4-1987; Lovett, Robert Morss, "A G.M. Stockholder Visits Flint," *The Nation* 144 (January 30, 1937): 124.

[51] "The Automobile Worker," *GM Strike Bulletin,* 1-19-1937, Bud and Hazel Simons Collection, Acc# 160, Box 1, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Many in the UAW even accused the Flint Alliance of being involved in more than just a public relations campaign. During the strike, Wyndham Mortimer sent a letter to Bradshaw accusing him and the Flint Alliance of arming "gangs of vigilantes," and announcing "to the press that quote we are going down to Fisher Number one plant shooting unquote."[52] The UAW and the strikers all viewed the Flint Alliance as a strike breaking force, ready to use violence to oust them from the factories.[53]

The idea and usage of such a community organized group was not an isolated incident which occurred in this strike in Flint. There has been research done that suggested that these citizens' committees have been used by corporations many times during heated labor battles, not only for public relations, but also as a source of violence and vigilantyism. Flint was a perfect place for just such a group to materialize because historically they seemed to appear most in a city where there was a single industry that dominated all business trade, where local businesses were reliant on that particular corporation having success. The group painted itself to be a grass-roots movement of the people and justified its stance against the workers and the strike by convincing the people that law and order had broken down, much as it did in Flint at the time of the Battle of the Running Bulls.[54] Overall, there is little doubt that the Flint Alliance was formed by GM and the business community in Flint in an attempt to sway public opinion against the union, and as a way to break the strike itself.

Also on 5 January, GM and the City of Flint were trying to sway public opinion with the arrest of one of the strikers, Gerald DeMott, for carrying a concealed weapon--a homemade

---

[52] "Newswire from Mortimer to Mayor Bradshaw and City Manager Barringer" 1-3-1937, Frank Murphy Collection, Reel 108, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

[53] Al Anthony, *The History of UAW Local 659: We Make our Own History* (Flint, MI: Suburban Printing, 1993), 19; Joel Seidman, *Sit-Down* (Chicago: Socialist Party, USA, 1937), 15, Sam Dolgoff Collection, Box 2, Folder 16, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Haessler, 4.

[54] Louis G. Silverberg, " 'Citizens' Committees: Their Role in Industrial Conflict," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (March, 1941): 17-30.

blackjack. In his statement made to police, DeMott stated that he had been sitting in the factory but received a pass to go home. He claimed he received the blackjack from one of the other strikers, that there were between eight hundred and nine hundred blackjacks just like it still in the factory; that nearly every man was armed. When asked by the police officer why the men were all armed, he replied that they were afraid. "Nobody knows anything out there. They are milling around like a bunch of sheep and no sleep."[55] The police had definitely slanted the report against DeMott. He was described as a boozing lowlife, arrested at 3:30 a.m. Actually, he had been to several pubs that evening, was intoxicated, and had worked at one of the striking factories. However, DeMott was the exception rather than the norm, and was not a strong union man. In a lucid moment, he recalled that he left the factory after the men initially sat down at Fisher Body #1, then came back a few days later only to be arrested by the police. He also stated that after they went on strike at ten o'clock they "said no more work and so I quit."[56]

The city police continued their attack on the union and its leaders, arresting two UAW members after a brawl that erupted outside the Chevy plants on 6 January. The whole incident started when Roy Reuther and William Carney (both CIO organizers) used the sound car to encourage Chevy workers to join the strike and attend UAW meetings. According to the police, some of the Chevy workers came out and started fighting with the UAW supporters with the sound car, which resulted in someone calling the police and with the police arresting two UAW supporters. Afterwards, Roy Reuther and Travis gathered three hundred and fifty UAW

[55]"People vs. Gerald DeMott, Statement taken by Flint Police Department, by LT. Ray Martin," 5 January 1937, Frank Murphy Papers, Reel 108, 5, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

[56] "People vs. Gerald DeMott."; "Newswire from Mortimer 4 February 1937 to Mayor Bradshaw and City Manager Barringer," Frank Murphy Collection, Reel 108, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI. A common public complaint of Flint City Officials revolved around the excessive drinking of the GM workers and their destruction around town, claiming it was encouraged by the UAW and caused by outside agitation, yet in this telegram, Mortimer tells Bradshaw "you falsely claimed that union sympathizers were getting liquored up while at the same time you declined to shut off the liquor supply in the city." This suggests that the UAW was trying to remove that accusation and temptation from the men.

supporters together, marched to the police station with the sound car and urged the men on, threatening to come into the police station and retrieve their men. The police came out and used tear gas to disperse the crowd. Soon after, to the dismay of city police, Governor Murphy ordered the men be released from police custody, most likely in order to prevent any further violence.[57]

On 7 January, O'Rourke recorded in his diary that "Fisher #2 gets pretty cold when the heat has been turned off," which suggested that the company was now making attempts to force the men out.[58] Living in a factory in Michigan in the middle of winter without heat would be very uncomfortable for the men. Others also documented this event. Mundale stated in his interview that shortly before the Battle of the Running Bulls on 11 January, that the company guards came up to the second floor, shut off the heat, and locked the controls. According to Mundale, they had many handy men inside, and one of them simply went over, broke in, and turned the heat back on.[59]

GM VP Knudsen released a statement on 9 January, announcing that GM had offered to negotiate with the UAW only if the sit-down strikers evacuate their plants. He also declared that the UAW refused their offer, and "insisted on further restrictions of the Corporation's freedom of action."[60] Whether the men inside the plants heard of Knudsen's announcement is questionable. Some recalled having radios and newspapers brought inside the factory by the end of the first week, while others made it sound as though they had no word from the outside. It was obvious that by 10 January, the men were entrenched and had no plans of leaving. O'Rourke lamented

[57] Cronin, 9; "Labor: Automobile Armageddon."
[58] O'Rourke, 1-7-37.
[59] Mundale, interview.
[60] "Statement by W.S. Knudsen," 9 January 1937, Frank Murphy Collection, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mi, Reel 108.

that it was "Sunday and I've missed mass. I'm sorry, but I missed mass during the World's War and this is war."[61]

With such strong feelings brewing in the men inside, it was no wonder that the next day, 11 January, would bring the most violent encounter of the strike. The UAW came to call this the Battle of the Running Bulls, because the police or bulls retreated or ran from the factories. The whole scuffle seemed to originate with problems between the men in Fisher Body #2 and the company guards, who were occupying the first floor of the plant, while the men occupied the second. On 10 January, O'Rourke observed that the men and the guards were getting along fine. The strikers gave the guards hot coffee and chatted with them regularly because both groups understood that each was simply doing what was necessary to keep their jobs.[62] Mundale claimed that the men had no problems with the company guards; that after the strike started the strikers allowed the guards to stay on the first floor as long as they left the men alone. There seemed to be no indication that the company guards themselves planned any acts of violence or defiance against the men.[63]

The events of that day, 11 January, are highly contested by the men that were actually inside and involved in the scuffle, the Flint City Police, GM, and the news reporters who were outside. Many variations of the story exist. It is important to consider what the men inside and the pickets who were involved outside actually recall happened. Everyone agreed that the trouble began that day when GM made efforts to place Fisher Body #2 in what Knudsen later described as shut down mode. First, GM externally turned off the heat. Then, around six p.m. the company guards removed the ladder that the union used to hoist food to the men, who occupied the second floor of the building. O'Rourke described how he and the men watched in

[61] O'Rourke 1-10-37.
[62] O'Rourke 1-10-37.
[63] Mundale, interview.

wonder as twenty-two company guards armed with nightsticks marched over and took their ladder away. He wondered why the guards needed to be armed when the men had never given them trouble before.[64]

What O'Rourke described next may seem like a small detail; however, when considering the whole progression of violence that evening and when trying to answer the question of who was at fault, it becomes a very important detail that historians still debate. O'Rourke observed, "Wonder why all the police are out in front. See, there's another car of plain clothes men, driving up to the curb. Watch them report to those scout cars that are parked across the road. Do they think we would start trouble?"[65] O'Rourke suggested that the police were on scene before any trouble erupted between the strikers and the company guards, indicating that this could have been a planned attack by the police orchestrated with GM, who may have instructed their company guards to starve out the men. The city police would then be ready to force them out of the factory.[66]

Whether the police were there in advance, the company guards made the decision to escalate the stakes even higher by locking the front gate and not allowing the union to bring food into the men that way. Since the men had always felt that they had a good relationship with the company guards, many of the men even recalled the head guard's name as Peterson, they decided to send a delegate down to request that he reopen the front door. Most men agreed that the leaders sent down about fifteen strikers to the gate to speak with Peterson. Mundale

[64] O'Rourke 1-11-37.

[65] O'Rourke 1-11-37.

[66] Seidman, 15. "The city police, who had cleared nearby streets in advance, then attacked in an effort to recapture the gates."; Bliven, 378, He collaborated the story that the police were there and assembled before the strikers ever took the gates, that in fact they were trying to clear the streets and block the ends off "Persons whose cars were parked in the area were brusquely told to go elsewhere."; Lovett, 123. He colloberates the story that the strikers had told him later that the police were there in advance and that the hospital was warned beforehand of possible violence.

identified Roscoe Rich as the leader of this group of strikers who went to speak with the guards. Ahearn expressed that the strikers gave the guards three minutes to open the gate or hand over the keys, but instead, Peterson told the men that he had lost the keys. Towards the end of the three minutes, the guards fled from the gate and hid in the women's restroom, which allowed the group of strikers to force open the gates.

At this point, the response of the police comes into question again. The *New York Times* reporter argued that the police showed up a little after the men were already outside with the other strikers, and then they only got involved because they found that four hundred strikers subdued the company guards. They wanted to restore order, and reestablish the guards back to the gates. Many of those involved, however, gave a different account of events once the gates opened. William Weinstone, head of the Communist Party in Michigan during the Sit-Down, recalled that he knew that the city police were planning an attack on Fisher Body #2 before it even occurred because he had an informant in Fisher Body #1 who knew of police plans. "I was standing on the corner," Weinstone related, "…opposite Fisher 2. I saw the policemen come, saw them smash the door, saw him answered by the inside with the company guards controlling the door. Shoved all the guards away."[67] Weinstone suggested that the police came in before the men even took the gate from the company guards, showing a planned attack on the strikers, rather than a response to a riot call.

The men inside Fisher Body #2, at the door when it opened, described a different scene than the *New York Times* reporter as well. Ahearn and Connolly were at the gate, and they claimed that the police were outside the door as soon as it opened. With their riot shields, gas masks, and helmets, they charged the gate and the men. A tear gas bomb even hit Connolly in the

[67] Weinstone, interview; "Flint Group Asks President to Act," *New York Times* 1-12-37, 12:5.

eye while he was still inside the plant, not outside.[68] Mundale also remembered that the men were met with police violence as soon as the gate opened and that the police were already there waiting.[69]

The *New York Times* reporter was not the only one who gave a different story, but also GM, while all the men on the inside had a consistent recollection of the events that evening. Still, GM and the city of Flint gave a much different account, making the union at fault, stating that it instigated the events that evening. In his report to Congress, Cronin argued that Victor Reuther was working the sound car that evening and that he ordered the men inside to take the front gate from the company. He said that only after violence had erupted did the city police show up to rescue the company guards inside the factory.[70]

The *Flint Journal* stated in its commemorative book written in the 1970s, based on *Flint Journal* articles from the actually strike, that at 9:30 p.m. Victor Reuther and William Carney arrived at Fisher Body #2 in the sound car and ordered the men inside to take the gate. Ten minutes later, the men emerged from the gate, celebrating with pickets outside on the street. The reporter had stated that it took minutes for the police to arrive, and that only thirty cops came at that time.[71]

Significant facts back up the story of the men inside the plant. First, the city of Flint was admittedly a GM run town, with the *Flint Journal* repeatedly taking the side of the corporation over the striking men inside. The *New York Times* reporter was also somewhat hostile towards the union, mainly because Travis refused to speak with the reporter because he was not a member of the Newspaper union. Historians agree that there were obvious links between the city

[68] Ahearn, interview; Connolly, interview.
[69] Mundale, interview.
[70] Cronin.
[71] Lawrence R. Gustin, Ed. *Flint Journal Centennial Picture History of Flint*,

officials who controlled the police force and GM management, so it would not be too far a stretch to believe that the city police were working in accord with the company. As Homer Martin, the head of the UAW, later argued, the city police had no jurisdiction to come in and retake the gate for the company from the men.[72]

Second, everyone, including GM, believed that Fisher Body #1 was the strongest held plant, that the men in Fisher Body #2 were less radical to begin with and that towards the second week of the strike they were weakening inside. Even the men concluded that they had lost many men before that evening. If the police and GM were going to plan a raid on one of the plants in an effort to weaken the momentum of the union, they would have targeted Fisher Body #2, not Fisher Body #1.

Third, the men inside, even the day before, described their relationship with the company guards as being friendly and one that consisted of mutual respect. The company guards on their own would not have denied the men access to the front gate and food, nor would the men have attacked the company guards and caused them any harm. Whether GM wanted to take the blame for the events that unfolded that evening, by ordering the company guards to cut the men off from their food source, GM management knew that they would be starting trouble that had not been there before that incident.

What happened next was a three to four hour riot that ended in injury for many people, but the seriously injured numbered twenty-four, with nineteen of them being strikers and five being city police. The strikers inside and out, by most accounts, were armed only with projectiles and fire hoses, while the city police had rifles and tear and vomit gas. The strikers had the advantage of sheer numbers because once the news of violence broke thousands came to the scene to participate in the riot and help the sit-downers hold their ground inside the plant.

[72] Travis and Killinger, interview; "2,000 Guardsmen," *New York Times,* 1-13-37.

"Anybody that even had the slightest idea they wanted to be union," Mundale recalled, "they were comin' down there then."[73]

Ahearn stated that the union's Flying Squadrons were working overtime that night, bringing men and women from all over the city to Fisher Body #2 to help. He said that they had about fifteen men who came from the Fleetwood plant in Detroit who stood between the factory and the police, holding them off for most of the battle. Cronin told Congress that Victor Reuther at one point told the men to go home and get their guns; however, there has never been any evidence that any of the men were armed with guns, since this would have resulted in much greater casualties. In fact, all those shot were shot by police rifles, even the one police officer who was shot was probably caught in the crossfire. O'Rourke wrote, "Bring up those hoses…stones, bottles, bricks, hinges, bolts. Flying through the air, not much for defence but that's all we have. Some of our men are down. Lousy, shooting a man when he has no gun."[74]

The shooting did not come right in the beginning, as the police tried to evict the strikers with tear and vomit gas. The strikers all believed their best defense against these attacks were to use the fire hoses. Not only was it January in Michigan and very cold, but the water worked to diffuse the gas bombs before they had the opportunity to erupt in the men's area. The force of the hoses also worked to force the police back (whose numbers reached approximately 120). The strikers recalled that they did not want to fight the police; they had planned a sit-down strike in order to avoid the violence many of them had experienced in the past with outside protests. However, as the police started to retreat and shoot their rifles at the strikers, many felt as though this was a battle for their life. "It was part of something you did because you had to…who wants to fight law that is supposed to uphold everything you stand for?" Ahearn recalled, "And who

[73] Mundale, interview; "Flint Group Asks President to Act."
[74] O'Rourke 1-11-37; "Flint Group Asks President to Act."

wants to battle somebody or watch their close friends shot over something as asinine as a profit?"[75]

Whether they all wanted to fight, the battle on Chevrolet Avenue raged on into the night, with the strikers tearing apart police cars, even flipping over Sheriff Wolcott's vehicle while he was still inside it. Some of the men admitted that souvenirs they kept from that night included parts of police cars and pavement. Mundale remembered one young striker who came running back inside the plant with half of a cop's uniform, his gun and belt. He told Mundale he stripped the cop as he was trying to crawl away under a fence. Many cops entered the hospital with head injuries from the projectiles thrown from the roof of the factory that night.[76]

The results from the battle on Chevrolet Avenue were many. The District Attorney in Flint (Joseph) issued three hundred "John Doe" warrants for all the men inside Fisher Body #2, and the city issued twenty-one named warrants; seven for the leaders of the union and fourteen for men in the hospital with injuries. Perhaps because of the violence or the longevity of the strike itself, it is at this point that Governor Frank Murphy became actively and publicly involved in the strike. He ordered that the sheriff spare the fourteen men, and had their warrants removed. He also asked that Sheriff Wolcott not act upon the three hundred "John Doe" warrants to avoid any further violence. Most important, he arrived in Flint in the early morning hours of 12 January, bringing with him the National Guard to restore and maintain order in and around Flint until the union and GM could came to an agreement.[77]

The Governor called up the National Guard and had the men shipped by train, arriving in Flint in the early morning hours of 14 January. Most of the National Guardsmen came from the Grand Rapids area, although one of them was a sit-down striker at a plant in Detroit. The other

[75] Ahearn, interview; Mundale, interview; O'Rourke 1-11-37.
[76] Ahearn, interview; Mundale, interview; O'Rourke, diary.
[77] Cronin, 11; "Flint Group Asks President to Act,"; Simons, interview.

strikers all voted for him to fulfill his obligations to the National Guard and leave the plant. The feelings of the Guardsmen varied greatly, but most hoped for no violence and understood the position of the men inside the factories, having come from working class families themselves. However, as Lieutenant Japinga recalled, the Guardsmen did as the Governor commanded them. Most of the Guardsmen formed a perimeter around Fisher Body #2 in order to prevent any further violence. The Guardsmen allowed the men inside to receive food and news from the union, but they would not allow anyone to leave or enter the plant. The city housed the remaining Guardsmen at a local school where they cleaned the floors and waited in case there was violence anywhere else in the city.[78]

The men in Fisher Body #1 expressed that after they heard of the riot at Fisher Body #2 they were certain that the police would next be after them. Men in both factories stated that they were relieved once they heard that Governor Murphy was sending in the National Guard to prevent any further violence. As far as morale of the men in Fisher Body #2, there is some question, because Connolly remembered that many men left after the Battle of Running Bulls, with only twenty-five remaining inside. However, Ahearn stated that because they had won the Battle and had the Guardsmen protecting them that their morale was high. "After the battle with the police, there was a close-knit unity of some of the deepest brotherhood that I've ever witnessed between men. And rightfully so, because you had just laid your life on the line for one another."[79]

Governor Murphy was determined to bring the two sides together and initiate talks. In the wake of such violence he was finally able to convince GM officials that they must sit down and meet with the UAW, even if the strikers did not leave the plants. Murphy called a

[78] Martin Japinga, interviewed by Neil Leighton, 5 March 1980, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.

[79] Ahearn, interview; Connolly, interview; O'Rourke 1-12-37.

mandatory meeting for 14 January in his Lansing office. Martin and Knudsen arrived, and after an intense sixteen-hour session they were unable to reach an agreement; however, a truce emerged. The UAW agreed to remove the sit-down strikers from all five plants and GM promised not to remove any dies or important machinery from the plants nor would they resume operations at the struck plants until negotiations were complete.[80]

Men inside the factories knew of the planned meeting and had very high hopes that the two sides would end the strike quickly. O'Rourke recalled that all the men were crowded around the radio and waiting for news. On 15 January, UAW leaders informed the men that they would be leaving the factories so that the UAW and GM could start collective bargaining. The plants were going to evacuate one at a time, with Indiana going first, then Detroit. Finally, the two Flint plants would leave last on Sunday, 17 January. GM and the UAW were scheduled to resume negotiations on 18 January. O'Rourke stated that he and the men were content with this agreement and were all ready to return to their homes.[81]

At the same time as Knudsen was meeting with Martin in Lansing, he was also replying to requests from Boysen and the Flint Alliance, who claimed to represent the majority of Flint autoworkers who were not involved in the Sit-Down Strike. Knudsen informed Boysen that GM would also meet with him and the Flint Alliance in order to negotiate. When the UAW in Flint heard of this agreement it felt betrayed by GM, since the Flint Alliance was very anti-UAW. The UAW also felt that this went against everything that it and the men had been fighting for, which was national recognition as the sole bargaining agent for the men in the factories.[82]

By 17 January, the UAW had already emptied out the factories in Indiana and Detroit, and all that remained were the Fisher plants in Flint. O'Rourke offered a detailed account of

[80] "National Affairs: Alarums & Excursions," *Time Magazine* 1-25-37.
[81] O'Rourke 1-15-37.
[82] "National Affairs: Alarums & Excursions."

events that day. The men were up early, dressed in their suits, shined their shoes and prepared for their triumphant march out. Then, at 1:45 p.m., the sound car approached Fisher Body #2 and announced that GM had double-crossed the men. "We are not going to leave the plants? Gee! I feel dizzy. Not going home…General Motors would not keep an honest agreement. Boysen and his Flint Alliance. This thing would have been settled long ago and we would have been back at our jobs were it not for them."[83]

The men's spirits were decidedly broken after they were so close to going home in mid-January; however, they all voted to stay inside and refused to accept what they perceived as GM's dirty deal. O'Rourke wrote, "These men are sick at heart. Now do you wonder why we trust no one? Can you tell us why we should? Is it any wonder these good men rebelled?"[84] Not surprisingly, no one showed up at Murphy's office on 18 January to begin negotiations. GM refused to meet since the UAW did not evacuate all the plants. On 21 January, things still looking bleak, the United States inaugurated President Roosevelt for his second term. In attendance, CIO leader John L. Lewis had some choice words for the president. He stated that labor had insured him his reelection and they expected FDR to help them in their current struggle. This was a bold statement indeed, even for a man as flamboyant as Lewis. Murphy was now in communication with Labor Secretary Frances Perkins, and together they were slowly roping Knudsen and Sloan back to the negotiating table. However, after Lewis's statement, Sloan and Knudsen refused to return to the bargaining table, claiming that they saw no point in continuing to negotiate with the CIO. The stalemate forced Perkins to invoke Congressional

[83] O'Rourke 1-17-37.
[84] O'Rourke 1-19-37.

power to mediate in the labor dispute, and she tried desperately to force the two sides together in Washington, D.C.[85]

Sloan and Knudsen continued to stand firm, telling the government that they would only meet with the UAW when the men left the factories in Flint. FDR made a public statement in which he expressed his disappointment in Sloan. Perkins began to lose her patience with the auto manufacturer and publicly reprimanded Sloan for his actions, stating, "The real reason the workers would not take their men out of the plants was that they felt they couldn't trust General Motors. An episode like this must explain to the American people and make it clear why the workers can't trust General Motors."[86] Reporters were stunned by her candor and asked if FDR knew that she was saying this, to which she replied that the president had no idea.

Sloan continued to anger the Labor Secretary, meeting with her secretly, promising to return to the bargaining table, and then flying back to New York the same day, only to inform her that he could not meet. This was now the end of January and no negotiation was in sight. Both the UAW and GM were planning their next big move. It turned out, the UAW's next move was much bigger than anything that GM had planned.[87]

Time itself seemed to be working against the UAW and the strikers. During the first week of February GM had another injunction ordered against the strikers inside the factories from the reputable Judge Paul Gandola. Coinciding with the injunction the Flint Alliance held a massive rally at the IMA (a GM auditorium in Flint) claiming eight thousand in attendance

[85] "National Affairs: On the March," *Time Magazine* 2-1-37; "Auto Strike Parley Off; Strikers Stay in Plants So G.M.C. Bars Talk," *New York Times* 1-18-37, 1:8.

[86] "National Affairs: U.S. Terror," *Time Magazine* 2-8-37.

[87] "National Affairs: U.S. Terror,"; O'Rourke 1-26-37 through 1-30-37.

supporting a return to work platform put forward by the company. As a result, some of the strikers seemed to be losing hope inside the Fisher plants.[88]

The UAW, however, had a plan to effectively counteract that of management—take down another plant. As diarist O'Rourke observed, the union was stronger than many believed and "we can call out more shops if it is necessary."[89] The most important factory still operating in Flint was Chevrolet Plant #4. GM management suspected that the UAW would attempt to take the plant and had beefed up the security force there to prevent any such occurrence. One of the UAW men in Chevy #4, Kermit Johnson, came to Robert Travis with a plan to take the plant in spite of the fact that the union sentiment within the plant was somewhat weak. Johnson's plan was simple enough: trick GM into believing that the union was taking down Chevy #9, a somewhat insignificant plant with a strong group of UAW members. As the men in Chevy #9 moved to sit-down, GM would shift security forces from Chevy #4 and at the same time union members from Chevy #6 would aid those few union members in Chevy #4 take the plant down.[90]

The plan, formulated even before the judge's injunction, was risky because if even one of the company's spies (referred to as stool pigeons by the union members) found out about the deception he would tell management and the entire scheme would fall apart. To prevent that from happening, Travis made sure that no one knew the plan except the Reuther brothers, Kraus, and Simons. On 31 January, Travis held a large union meeting at Pengelly with over fifteen hundred attendees from all the Chevy plants. Travis alluded to the men that something was going to happen, that if their plant should go down that they were to stick together and sit-down. Knowing that there were stool pigeons in attendance, Travis decided to use them to his advantage. After the meeting, he had each man come through a dark room, one at a time, and he

[88] "National Affairs: U.S. Terror."
[89] O'Rourke 1-30-37.
[90] Travis and Killinger, interview.

gave each a slip of paper (supposedly at random). He picked fifteen men to come back and meet with him at midnight, including stool pigeons. At that meeting he worked very hard to convince the men that the UAW planned to take down Chevy #9 the next day. Travis knew that the stool pigeons would believe this to be real information and would pass it along to GM, only making it more believable the next day.[91]

Events the next day transpired just as the UAW had planned. At the agreed time, men inside Chevy #9 began to shut down the line, ordering the men to sit-down. Every man in Chevy #9 believed that they were the targeted plant. Next, GM security came over from Chevy #4 and reinforced the guards at Chevy #9. The company guards attacked the men inside Chevy #9 with tear gas as GM tried to prevent the UAW from taking another plant. The newly formed Women's Emergency Brigade, lead by Kermit Johnson's wife, Genora Johnson Dillinger, arrived at Chevy #9 and stood between the company guards and the plant. Each woman had a red beret and matching red armband, and the union had armed them with blackjack clubs that they used to smash open the windows in Chevy #9 to clear the tear gas filled air and allow the men inside to breath and fight. As the battle at Chevy #9 raged on, with all participants certain they were the center of the plan, at Chevy #6 men traveled through the train tunnels that connected Chevy #6 and Chevy #4. When they arrived at Chevy #4 they helped Johnson and the other union men shut the line down and take Chevy #4. The union men in Chevy #4 allowed those who wanted to leave to do so, but most of the men estimated that between two hundred and three hundred men stayed in, counting the men who came over from Chevy #6. Havrilla claimed that the police showed up and tried to break through the locked gate to get the strikers out, but the men stood strong and resolute "willing to kill ourself or them."[92]

[91] Travis and Killinger, interview.
[92] Havrilla, interview.

News of the UAW victory at Chevy #4 spread quickly. On 2 February, the National Guard moved in and took over Chevrolet Avenue, surrounding Chevy #4. At the same time, the men inside received word of Judge Gandola's injunction, and Sheriff Wolcott gave the men until 3 p.m. on 3 February to leave the factories. The men sent a messenger to UAW headquarters to get orders from the leaders and got the signal back to "hold the fort."[93] Turns out Governor Murphy had asked that the injunction be set aside because he was finally getting the two sides to meet and resume negotiations, which could be damaged by any more violence.

After Chevy #4 fell, completely crippling GM, management decided it was time to return to the negotiating table. For the men inside, things began to look very bleak. The Guardsmen were now controlling everything going in and out of the factories, meaning that the men got little word from home or the UAW. The Guards allowed them one mail man to whom they issued a military pass in order to deliver them letters from home, but the time passed slowly. Travis stated that conditions in Chevy #4 were very difficult for the men; some even received food poisoning at one point. O'Rourke wrote that the food supply was getting low, and that the men in all the factories had very little to eat. O'Rourke noted that he had lost twenty-six pounds while sitting inside.[94]

The men also had to deal with public opinion on the outside, and most of the word that came through the media was not supportive of the men or the strike. GM may have entered negotiations again, but they were not keeping quiet about the effect of the strike on the men and women who were not part of the UAW who simply wanted to return to work. O'Rourke lamented on 6 February: "We casually are laid off six to ten weeks at the end of each year.

[93] O'Rourke 2-2-37.
[94] Travis and Killinger, interview; O'Rourke 2-4-37.

Funny how no one tells how much we lose then. But the papers are mentioning how much we are losing every day now."[95]

There were also allegations that GM was hatching a plan to evict the strikers from Chevy #4. A man named Robert Evans, who worked at Chevy #4, claimed that before the plant had gone on strike, he had inquired to his foreman about becoming part of plant security, but the foreman told him there were no openings at the time. When the plant went down, he was not against the union, but was not an active member, so he left the factory. He stated that soon after a man from plant management came to his house and offered him a position with plant security. The man told Evans to show up at a garage by the plants at a certain time. When he arrived, the garage was guarded by the National Guard who had his name on a list and let him through. There were about sixty to one-hundred other men there, and management told them of a plan to drive trucks along the railroad tracks between the Chevy plants. The men would use the trucks to ram the doors open, and then the men were to go inside and forcibly evict the strikers from Chevy #4. Evans felt that this was a mistake, that men would be hurt, so he went and told the UAW of the planned attack. The UAW instructed him to continue to attend the meetings in order to keep them informed. Evans went to a second meeting, but by the time he went to the third meeting the guards would not allow him in, which meant that management probably caught him talking to the UAW. He did not know why GM never carried out the plan; perhaps the two sides settled the strike before the violence erupted.[96]

Even though the men were weary, battered, and broken, as the end drew near they held fast inside the three factories. They had hope in Governor Murphy; they believed that he was working to get the two sides together. On 10 February, at 5:45 a.m., O'Rourke wrote that a

[95] O'Rourke 2-6-37.

[96] Robert Evans, interviewed by William Meyer, 29 February 1980, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.

newspaperman named McIntyre from the *Detroit News* informed the men that the two sides had reached an agreement. Later that same day the men got the official word from the UAW and they planned their march out on 11 February. The first to leave was Fisher Body #1, then Chevy #4 and finally Fisher Body #2. For O'Rourke, victory was sweet. His final entry read "Two wars we've been through and this last one we knew what we were fighting for."[97]

For other men, the end was met with relief, but also anger and bitterness. Many of them had spent forty-four days locked inside a cold factory, away from their homes and families. At the same time, they saw many GM workers continuing with their lives, joining organizations such as the Flint Alliance, and slandering the strikers around town and in the media. As word of victory spread around the city, some of these same men and workers came climbing in through the windows of the factories, congratulating the men and then marching out in victory alongside the few who had actually stood their ground.[98]

The agreement itself was not a complete victory for the UAW, but it was an important beginning and led to a very strong contract between the UAW and GM, making the UAW the official union of the auto manufacturer, and eventually for all of the auto industry. Initially, GM agreed to recognize the UAW as the sole bargaining agent for the plants that had been on strike and promised not to enter into negotiations with any other organization while negotiating with the UAW. In exchange, the UAW would evacuate all GM plants. On 11 March 1937, the two sides came to a final agreement, with GM conceding that there were issues that needed to be dealt with and negotiated at a national level, and that they would discuss these with the UAW.[99]

---

[97] O'Rourke 2-10-37.

[98] Mundale, interview; Irving King, interviewed by Kenneth West, 26 March 1980, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.

[99] "Agreement between GM and UAW 11/March 37," The Flint Labor Collection, Acc #517, Box #1, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

In Flint, the men claimed that other GM workers flocked to join the UAW and rejoiced with the men over the victory. Throughout the strike the men had been drawn together through adversity and comradery. The UAW men wrote songs to commemorate the struggle, and the union men proudly marched out of the factories, through the streets of downtown Flint, ending at their union headquarters. They all understood that they had changed labor history forever.

The story of the Flint Sit-Down Strike, the workers, and the UAW goes far beyond the victory march that day in February. So many questions remain about the story behind the story, specifically what brought the men together and just exactly whom they owed for their eventual victory. The UAW would grow into one of the most powerful unions in the United States, making the questions about its origins, along with the political leanings of its men, one of the utmost importance.

CHAPTER 3

THE POLITICS BETWEEN THE STRIKE

The political climate of 1930s America was a unique period in American history. The fact that America was in the midst of the Great Depression greatly affected the way average Americans viewed their government and the future of America in general. Many were more open to radical, seemingly foreign ideas, and found ways to adapt these ideas to fit into their own American political ideals and traditions. The autoworkers were one such group which faced many political alternatives during the great unionization drive in the auto industry during this turbulent time. The rank and file of the auto industry had choices to make between following the Communists, Socialists, Proletarians, New Deal Democrats, and even fascist groups. Overall, the vision of Communism that most modern Americans share is quite different from the way that the Communists and Marxists operated in America during the 1930s. In reality Communists were the ones who listened to the needs of the autoworkers, supported their industrial unionization effort, and helped them achieve real, lasting results toward collective bargaining during the Great Depression.

Although many autoworkers have vehemently denied any affiliation with the Communist Party over the years, and the Communist Party has been left out of a lot of union histories, it is a known fact that the Communist Party was the most active force behind the unionization of the industry. What is unclear is to what extent the average rank and file worker would have knowingly followed a Communist movement and to what extent they may have sympathized with the Communist leaders. Since most deny such involvement, it is generally accepted that they simply went along with the leadership either without the knowledge of their political beliefs, or in spite of such beliefs. The fact that Communism received such a tarnished image

after the 1930s, not only on a world and national scale, but also on the local union scale, is greatly ignored, even though this certainly factored into the collective memory of the autoworkers during the Cold War, when most histories of the strike were written.

It is important to understand all the movements that faced the autoworkers and to see how in fact the autoworkers rejected those movements while simultaneously being driven towards a more Communist tradition. One must also look at how American Communism differed from the world version of Communism (particularly in Soviet Russia) and how the Communist Party adapted in the 1930s to win over the workers of America, not just in the auto industry but throughout their industrial union drive. This involves a look at Communism and Marxism in America that goes beyond the official membership cards of the CPUSA (Communist Party of the United States of America), which actually boasted low numbers. Most autoworkers would have been too scared of being red-baited to ever officially join the CPUSA, and most remained on the fringes. Historian Roger Keeran stated that "only a few CP members…functioned openly as Communists, but many UAW members and local officers gained wide reputations as leftists who associated themselves with the party."[100]

The Communists

Communism in America must be viewed as two separate entities, first there was the official party that finally emerged from years of internal strife, the CPUSA. However, there was also a separate division of Communism in America, and that is the general movement to follow the ideas of Marxism and apply them to America, outside of the affiliation with the official party. The reason there was a disconnect between the official party and many Communist Americans is best answered by looking at how America was different from Soviet Russia and the world call to Communism. The CPUSA would constantly struggle to build an official party in America

[100] Keeran, *The Communist Party*, 187.

because it followed the Comintern (or the Communist International body, based in the USSR) and often ignored the unique situation that existed in America.[101] Many Communist followers, specifically some of those who were leaders in the autoworkers movement, were not specific followers of the CPUSA or their world view of Communism.[102]

The Communist Party in America had its roots in the Socialist Party, which it split from between 1917 and 1919. Those who split off into the Communists were the more radical, left wing side of the Socialist Party, inspired by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. From the beginning the Communists in America were separated into factions, one being the language federation and the other the labor party. The language federations were made up of the foreign born party members who did not fully understand American ideologies and goals, and therefore wanted to base the party more on the world revolution and the needs of the foreign countries they hailed from. The labor party was made up of more American born English speakers, who wanted to focus more on the needs of Americans, which they saw as quite different and distinct from the rest of the world. This split was eventually officially repaired, and the groups joined to form one party by 1924; however, the question over focus and policies would always remain in the party.[103]

From the beginning of the American movement, the leaders listened and followed the official line from the Comintern. This body worked for the start of the world revolution and also sought support for the USSR. Many members of the Communist Party in America would not always agree with the Comintern, but the leaders of the national party would listen to the Comintern. This is where much of the disconnect between the leaders and the followers

[101] Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1984), 11, 97.
[102] Keeran, *The Communist Party*, 24-25.
[103] Klehr, 9-11.

originated. The Comintern believed that the collapse of capitalism was inevitable after World War One, even in the U.S., while the majority of Americans involved in the movement did not agree. Those close to the party were trying to fight for better conditions for the workers, not push for a revolution. [104]

Through the 1920s, many of the CPUSA's goals revolved around the impending revolution in America, and so they worked hard to organize and rally the American workers to their cause by promoting industrial unionism. Many radical trade unionists, like William Z. Foster, were first attracted to the CPUSA through the unionization drive. Foster had been a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) since 1909 and would go on the become the leader of the industrial union drive in the Communist Party. As early as 1920, the Communist party and Foster had joined forces to enter the unionization drive by creating the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL). This industrial union worked within the American Federation of Labor (AFL) until 1923, when the AFL finally expelled all the TUEL members for dual unionism. The AFL was promoting their policy of skilled labor unions only, and thought that by having an industry wide union, such as TUEL, that the workers were being represented by two separate AFL unions.[105]

Even though the AFL had expelled the TUEL members, the Communist Party did not end their unionization drive. By 1925 the party had changed their name to the Workers' (Communist) Party, emphasizing their goal of organizing the workers in America. The Workers' Party and TUEL were involved in several different industries where they flourished in the 1920s, among which were the autoworkers that had begun to organize as early as 1891 under the Knights of Labor and then the AFL. Their union was made up of skilled workers in the

[104] Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 3; Klehr, 10-11.

[105] Klehr, 11-13; Ottanelli, 22.

International Union of Carriage and Wagon Workers.[106] The Automobile Workers Union (AWU) developed around that same time as an industrial union. By 1915 the AFL was demanding that the AWU drop the word automobile from their name. When the AWU refused the AFL's request, they were suspended by the AFL and were an independent union by 1918.[107]

The majority of the AWU's leadership was based in the Socialist Party from 1919 until about 1924. The union openly proclaimed their Socialist doctrine and backed Eugene V. Debs for president in 1920. Their union papers published articles that were sympathetic to the USSR, but at the same time were openly critical of the radical, newly formed, CPUSA. Despite their far leftist leanings, the AWU attracted many autoworkers, mainly because they were the only industrial alternative to the AFL. In 1919 the AWU had approximately 45,000 members and locals all over Michigan. However, the early 1920s were not favorable to the Socialist Party or unions, and by 1922 there was a great decline in membership for the AWU, with only about 800 members nationally.[108]

As the AWU was falling apart, the Communist party was becoming more and more interested in the autoworkers. Edgar Owens, a labor organizer for the Communists, came to the head of the AWU and offered to help the fledgling union by bringing in about twenty-five Communist organizers. Since the AWU was in such disarray, the Socialist leaders agreed to let Owen and the Communists in. The Communist organizers worked to build the unions within the shops, focusing on the workers day to day problems and demands, and the Communists always supported the workers' strikes, whether they were started through the AWU or not. They also sympathized with the workers' frustrations with the AFL. Their most effective tool was the shop paper that they put out in every auto factory in Michigan. Once they had successfully built a

[106] Changed in 1912 to the Union of Carriage, Wagon and Automobile Workers.
[107] Keeran, "Labour," 193, 200.
[108] Keeran, "Labour," 194-197.

Communist cell within the plant (even if it was only made up of a few workers) they would have them distribute a shop paper. These shop papers not only introduced many autoworkers to the union, but also to American Communism.[109]

These shop papers were quite different from those that were distributed by the AWU under the Socialist Party. The Communist papers only cost one cent, were only four pages long, and were written by actual workers in a dialect that the workers could understand. They also focused on the everyday issues of that particular factory, which made them much more relatable for the average worker. The Communists called for more equality in the workplace, such as for women and African Americans, and they avoided racial slurs. The Socialist papers, on the other hand, had a great disconnect from the average workers. The Socialist papers cost about fifteen cents, were around sixteen pages long, and had articles written for the masses by professional writers and journalists.[110]

The AWU would officially come under the control of the Communists in 1926 when Phil Raymond ran against the Socialist leadership for general-secretary and won by one vote. Raymond was an autoworker in Detroit and would greatly change the automotive industry through his AWU leadership. Once the Communists officially took over, the Socialists left the AWU in droves. Between 1926 and 1930 there would be over fifty major auto strikes (mostly in Flint and Detroit) and the AWU would be involved in most, even though they actually started few. The workers found that the AWU and Raymond were tremendously gifted organizers, but that their label as Communists or reds inevitably caused problems for the workers. Many strikes were led by the AWU, yet the AWU and the workers experienced very few victories. Raymond called the AWU "the fire department" because the workers called them in when they needed

[109] Keeran, "Labour," 199.
[110] Keeran, "Labour," 214-217.

help, and quickly forgot them once the strike was over.[111] Even more harmful to the AWU were the strikes in which the workers used them to organize, then booted them out of the strike once the public and the company started red baiting all the workers. Even though this may have hurt the image of the AWU, many of their ideas stuck among the workers, who did not forget the Communist loyalty when the AFL had forgotten them. The strike movement of the late 1920s also helped to train and build union leaders among the AWU, and this experience would pave the way for the upcoming unionization effort of the 1930s.[112]

Another affect that the AWU had on unionization in the 1920s was that they encouraged the AFL to look seriously at and consider organizing the autoworkers. The AFL was afraid that the AWU was gaining too much power and that the Communists could take control of the auto industry, so by 1926 they had decided to start a unionization drive in auto. However, their efforts proved to be half hearted and more words than actions. Phil Raymond and the AWU petitioned William Green and the AFL to be admitted back into the AFL, with the Communists arguing that they did not care who unionized auto, as long as the workers were united. Green, however, quickly answered their request by telling Raymond that the AWU was welcomed back, if they relinquished all control over to the AFL. Raymond refused to do that, and the AWU remained outside the AFL, and Green and his labor soldiers continued to ignore the autoworkers. This helped to fuel the flames of AFL resistance among the autoworkers, and the Communists would continually benefit from the mistakes of the AFL.[113]

With the end of the 1920s came one of the first major policy switches from the CPUSA and the Comintern. The period from 1928-1934 became known as the Third Period, and the official party line stated that capitalism was surely failing in the United States, and that the

[111] Keeran, "Labour," 221.
[112] Keeran, "Labour," 208-221.
[113] Keeran, "Labour," 211-213.

Communists in America needed to take a hard turn to the left and push more radical ideas on the American workers. The TUEL became the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) in 1929, openly promoting Communism and class warfare. The Comintern sensed a disconnect in America between the official party and the rank and file workers, and it sought to bring the two in line, not by softening the party, but by attempting to harden the workers. Foster began to fall out of favor with Moscow, and a new leader, Earl Browder, emerged, who did not have the industrial trade union connection with the workers. The labor oriented members of the Communist movement in America were not calling for a revolution like their new leader was demanding, but they were fighting low wages and bad living conditions and asking for the same things that other unions were asking for. For this reason, the AWU and the Communist Party in general remained strong among the autoworkers during the Third Period, even though many understood what the Comintern and CPUSA leadership did not, which was that the Great Depression completely weakened the position of the American worker, and that this was no time for them to take the upper hand or start a revolution.[114]

William Foster and the AWU were not pushing the revolution on the workers, and this allowed their union and ideologies to be accepted, even though official party line was calling for very radical ideas.[115] Foster wrote in 1936 that throughout the industrial drive that he was calling for three things: industrial unionism, rebelling against management and not accepting being second class citizens, and trade union democracy. This last item would become a big selling point for the Communists among the autoworkers, especially when it came down to their decision in 1935 to stick with the AFL or move onto the newly formed Congress of Industrial

[114] Ottanelli, 18-28; Keeran, *The Communist Party,* 7.

[115] Keeran, *The Communist Party,* 162. Weinstone stated "the workers were not motivated by revolutionary aims in occupying the plants but were limiting themselves to a form of pressure to achieve their immediate ends."

Organization (CIO). The autoworkers would stay with their Communist leadership throughout the 1920s and 1930s because they were promoting union democracy—that each member would have a voice and a vote. This idea in and of itself shows that the American Communist won favor by listening to the autoworkers' needs and desires and not prescribing foreign ideas to American ideals.[116]

Even though the Communists and the AWU were working hard within the auto industry to gain the trust and support of the autoworkers, the big auto manufacturers were looking for a way to discredit the union and the autoworkers each and every time they struck. There are numerous examples of AWU lead strikes in which the manufacturers discredited the workers by pointing out their Communist influence and leadership, beginning a long tradition of red baiting, which not only harmed the workers, but the image of the AWU and Communism in general. An early example of this came in 1928 in Flint at the Fisher Body plant. The federal government sent in B.M. Marshman, a representative, to investigate the strike, and he first contacted the general manager of the factory, R.J. Whiting to find out the origins of the strike. Whiting informed him that the strike began in the rubber department by about 125 men. He admitted that on average the workers made one dollar an hour and worked a nine hour day; however, during slow times management was generous enough to curtail layoffs by cutting some of the men's wages in half, while working them the same hours and still paying some of the men full salary. He immediately pointed the finger at Communists in the department who had their pay cut in half and then proceeded to get the rest of the men riled up.[117]

---

[116] William Z. Foster, *Industrial Unionism* (New York: Workers Library Publishers, Inc., 1936), Sam Dolgoff Collection, Box 1, Folder 1-23: Industrial Unionism, 1936, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University, Detroit, Mi. Keeran ,*The Communist Party,* 8, 58.

[117] "Letter Regarding Strike Investigation by BM Marshman to Hugh L. Kerwin," (7-23-28) Labor History Project, Labor Dispute Case Files Concerning Flint 1928-1943, University of Michigan, Flint.

The labor conciliator next contacted the Flint Federation of Labor (an AFL affiliate, which only represented skilled workers in the factory). He reported that the Federation "refused to have anything to do with the matter because it was caused and conducted by a group of Communists."[118] His conclusion was to agree with Whiting, that no Communists should be rehired. Marshman ended his investigation there, never speaking with one of the disaffected workers, stating "I did not attempt to get in touch with the leaders of the strike owing to what I had learned though Mr. Whiting and the Flint Federation of Labor."[119]

For the autoworkers, this was an early lesson in the manipulation of the manufacturers and how they would use red baiting against the workers, denying them their rights. The autoworkers, however, also learned that the only group that would help them were the Communists and this struggle placed them between a rock and a hard place. The autoworkers continued to rely on the Communists, and the stakes got higher and higher as the depression got deeper and deeper.

Another example of an AWU led strike came again in Flint to the Fisher Body plants, this time in 1930. The trouble began this time over more wage cuts, and 200 workers stopped working and walked out. Before it was over 3,600 joined the strike and 7,500 workers were idled. From the very beginning the strike was labeled as Communist inspired, which allowed for the Mayor and chief of police to justify the use of violence against the strikers. Many strikers involved in the Sit-Down Strike of 1936 would remember how the State Police came in during the 1930 strike on horseback, running the strikers over and clubbing many into submission. Even in the midst of all of this, Marshman did not even take the time to travel to Flint. He simply contacted George Starkweather, the leader of the Flint Federation of Labor, who

[118] "Letter Regarding Strike Investigation."
[119] "Letter Regarding Strike Investigation."

informed him it was again a Communist lead strike and that they had put the Communists (including Raymond) into jail that day.[120]

After being summarily beaten into submission by the police and understanding that they would most likely face permanent unemployment, many of the workers came out and publicly denounced the Communists and the AWU who had come in to help them. Even Whiting recognized the fact that it was only because of the Communists that the workers had the nerve to speak up in the first place, telling the *New York Times* that these wage cuts had come every year without complaint and that "the only difference in the attitude of the men this year…is that today they are under the influence of communistic leaders."[121] All involved understood that the Communists were giving the workers a voice, and management, not liking that, used it against them.

Perhaps the most well-documented strike led by the AWU came in 1933 at the Briggs Manufacturing Plant in Detroit, which has been called the "most important labor confrontation in the industry during the pre-New Deal era."[122] At the time, future governor Frank Murphy was the Mayor of Detroit, and he established a fact-finding committee to help resolve the strike. There were many complaints that came from the Briggs workers; the plant was known as one of the most dangerous factories in which to work. Many of their grievances would be similar to those issued during the Sit-Down that was to follow in 1936. They were striking against "dead time," low wages, confusing piece rate systems that no one understood, the dreaded speed-up of the line

[120] "Letter from Marshman, Commissioner of Conciliation, to Hugh L. Kerwin" (7-3-1930) Labor History Project, Box 1, Labor Dispute Case Files Concerning Flint 1928-1943, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.; "Fisher Body Strikers Clash with Troopers," *New York Times,* July 4, 1930, 2:5; Barnard, 41; Fine, 65-66; Joyce Shaw Peterson, *American Automobile Workers, 1900-1933* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 127.

[121] "Fisher Body." *The New York Times;* "Flint Strikers Shun Reds." *The New York Times,* 7-6-30, 17:2.

[122] Ottanelli, 27.

which "drove men beyond the limits of human endurance,"[123] unhealthy, unclean, and dangerous working conditions.[124]

The Murphy committee looked into the employers allegations that the strike was led by Communist agitators and the AWU. The committee found that the strike happened spontaneously among the workers, but that once out on strike they found themselves to be leaderless and disorganized, and so the strikers invited Raymond and the AWU to take over. Some of the workers claimed not to know that Raymond was a Communist, while most said that they knew, but also understood that they needed organization and that he was the man to do that. The Committee also found that the employers had exaggerated the extent of Communist influence and that those involved in the strike were not advertising any Communist ideals. The large number of Communists involved found it necessary to conceal their identity "and whenever occasion requires disavow their affiliation with the Communist Party."[125] This shows conclusively that the autoworkers were learning that they needed the AWU and the Communists and that they needed to hide the fact that they were Communists for fear of being red baited.

Even though they worked to conceal their AWU affiliation, their Briggs strike was doomed from the beginning because the workers had taken on a much larger enemy than just the local Briggs's management. The factory made all the bodies for the Ford Motor Company, and Henry Ford, not happy with having to shut down his factories because of this strike, did not sit back and quietly wait for resolution. He made it clear to Briggs management that it needed to settle the strike, or he was going to remove his dies and build his own body factory. Briggs quickly offered the strikers a pay raise but would not agree to set up a union committee or negotiate with the workers. The majority of the strikers held on, but in the end, Briggs simply

[123] Briggs Strike Papers, 1933, Frank Murphy Collection, Reel 98, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 15.
[124] Briggs Strike Papers, 1933, 8-15
[125] Briggs Strike Papers, 1933,33, 21-32.

rehired through the picket lines. After only a week the factory was back up and running. Some who hired back in were strikers while others were scabs. Those labeled as Communists were not rehired.[126]

Even though Briggs was up and running, the strike did not end, and the unrest in Detroit continued among those who were holding out, hoping to win union recognition. Those workers on strike began to attack those who were returning to work, stoning street cars full of Briggs 'scabs.' Their frustration was mounting as management told newspapers that unions were bad for the industry, and they would not recognize one. Even though the Communists were blamed with the rise in violence that came as the strike continued, the truth was that Raymond had been arrested a few days before the first streetcar attack, and that the workers had come out that day and declared that they had "eliminated the Communists and their allied organizations in general."[127]

The strikers at Briggs lost in the end, and they did not just lose their jobs but also an important battle against the manufacturers. They showed that they could be bullied into denying their affiliation with the only union that was embracing them and helping them strike. They showed the auto manufacturers their hand, and Briggs understood now how to defeat any autoworkers strike. Walter O. Briggs told the *New York Times* that "the published statement of the strikers' committee fully confirms what this company has said about the strike from the

[126] "Pay Rise Brings Ford Shut-Down Near End; Auto Maker is Quoted as Blaming Bankers." *The New York Times* 1-28-33, 1:4; Harold N. Denny, "Ford is Considering Making Car Bodies," *The New York Times,* 1-29-33, 1:2; Harold N. Denny, "Crisis Comes Today in Ford Shut-Down," *The New York Times* -1-30-33, 3:5; Harold N. Denny, "Briggs Plant gets Ford Ultimatum," *The New York Times* 1-31-33, 9:2.

[127] "Hudson Plant Bids Strikers Return," *The New York Times,* 2-9-33, 14:2; Harold N. Denny, "Briggs Delivers Bodies for Fords," *New York Times* 2-2-33, 6:1; "Workers Stoned in Street Cars," *The New York Times* 2-5-33, 22:2; "Briggs Heads Rebuff a Strike Committee," *The New York Times,* 2-7-33, 1:6; "Hudson Auto Plant Closed by a Strike," *The New York Times,* 2- 8-33, 5:1.

outset, namely, that it was incited and led by Communist agitators."[128] The manufacturers gave the autoworkers plenty of reasons to hide any affiliation or sympathy that they had for the AWU or the Communist labor organizers.

The constant red baiting that occurred in the auto industry not only hurt the strike movement in general, but it also prevented the Communist Party and their unions from growing. TUUL members in general found conditions "extremely difficult" because of "blacklists, police raids, court injunctions, deportation of leaders, etc."[129] As a result of the red baiting and blacklisting techniques, most workers were greatly discouraged from officially joining Communist unions. However, even Foster recognized the fact that the Communists' "mass influence…extended far and wide beyond the concrete limits of the organization."[130] In recognizing this, the Communists in America had a policy of creating satellite organizations, called 'fronts' which reached out to the working community, gaining support without openly being labeled a Communist organization. In cities such as Detroit and Flint, there was more support of the Communists, such as in the Detroit workers' approval of the Diego Rivera mural added to the Detroit Institute of Arts in 1932. Rivera was a well known Mexican Communist, yet he was commissioned for the work in Detroit. Despite criticism when the work was unveiled due to its depiction of interracial workers, glorification of workers, and disrespect for religion, the workers of Detroit rallied behind the mural. They held a massive protest when the city threatened to cover the mural, and they won, the mural still hangs in Detroit today. Other murals

[128] "Hudson Car Plants Resume Production," *The New York Times,* 2-10-33, 5:2.

[129] William Z. Foster, *American Trade Unionism and Organization Strategy and Tactics* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc,. 1947), 199.

[130] Foster, *American Trade Unionism*, 199.

created by Rivera during this time, like the ones he painted for Rockefeller in New York, also had overt Communist themes and were covered up.[131]

Outside of the strike issues, the Great Depression had another disturbing effect on the auto industry and the drive toward industrial unionization that the Communists responded to: unemployment. Throughout the nation unemployment was on the rise, but Detroit and Flint, along with other large manufacturing centers, were hit the hardest. Many autoworkers were out of a job, and this made their focus shift from industrial unionization to survival. The Communists responded to the situation. They created unemployment councils, which were part of the TUUL organization. They also organized Hunger Marches between 1930 and 1932, which took place in almost every major manufacturing city, including Detroit and Flint. These marches and unemployment organizations were openly Communist, yet they had thousands of participants and followers. In Detroit, the march turned violent once the marchers crossed the Detroit city line and entered Dearborn, a city run by Henry Ford and his 'Service Department'. The marchers were met by clubs and bullets, and the Communist Party was the organizer of the victims' funerals in Detroit, with over 60,000 reported supporters marching behind their caskets, which were draped in red and displayed in front of a large picture of Lenin. The people rallied behind the movement, not necessarily becoming members of the CPUSA, but endorsing the message and identifying with the only group who was willing to lead the fight for the working man's rights.[132]

---

[131] Klehr, 104; "The Diego Rivera Rockefeller Center and Detroit Museum of Art Murals," *Modern Monthly*, ND, Edward Levinson Collection, Box 3, Folder: Socialism, Walter Reuther Labor Archives and Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

[132] Ottanelli, 31; Keeran, "Labour," 223; Kenneth R. Dvorak, "Terror in Detroit: The Rise and Fall of Michigan's Black Legion," (PhD Dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 2000), 53-54; Foster, *American Trade Unionism*, 191; Barnard, *Vanguard* , 41-42, Barnard cites the actual number of funeral attendees much lower, at 8,000-10,000.

The Communist Party also remained militant in its support of the workers, even through unemployment, often times going in and reconnecting their gas or electricity once it had been disconnected or moving people's goods back into their home after a landlord had evicted them. The Communists were able to retain labor leaders who had been fired or blacklisted because of their Communist affiliation by also supporting them through their unemployment. The Communist Party understood what few other parties even took the time to consider, which was that once the men went back to work, they would remember who fought for them. The Communists' work with the unemployed through the worst few years of the Depression created class consciousness among the workers, while giving them experience in marching and organizing. All of their efforts made the workers more open to unionism once they went back to work.[133]

The Communists found many ways to gain support among the autoworkers using strategies that were not employed by other political organizations. One such policy they embraced was that of promoting racial equality. They formed a bond with the African Americans, and this would help to bring many autoworkers into the fold. The Communist Party called for class warfare, not racial warfare, and so it had no problem including them in the battle. The Communists worked to defend African Americans from racial injustice, such as in the Scottsboro case in 1931. Nine African American men were accused of raping two white women on a train. Even though the men were convicted, the CPUSA appealed the decision in 1935 and raised all the money for their legal defense. It was through such maneuvers that the Communists

[133] Ottanelli, 29, 36; Babson, 62-64; Wyndham Mortimer, *Organize! My Life as a Union Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 110.

gained a reputation in the African American community, and many would remember such acts and help lead the unionization drive that was to come in 1936-1937.[134]

In 1934 the CPUSA and the Comintern entered a new phase in their battle for the American worker, known as the Popular Front. This time period is marked by increased cooperation between the Communists and all other political movements in America, including the Socialists and the liberal government, all to combat fascism, which Stalin and the USSR saw as the true threat at the time, even over capitalism. They were still to work to organize the workers and prepare them for eventual rule, but the Communists in America were freed to work more intimately in American society, and their decision to work well with others opened up their options for unionization drives as well. Although this was the official line from the leaders of the CPUSA, it did not necessarily reflect any change in the Communists who were involved in the autoworkers' drive. There is much proof that they were always willing to work with any group that would help to organize the autoworkers even before the Popular Front, showing that they followed their own 'line' when it came to organizing the unions. They had learned long ago to do whatever was necessary to achieve victory for the workers, even small victories, and they did not push any policies which only fought for a revolution or for the workers to overthrow the government.[135]

The Communists' major success came in America at this time not because the country was ready for revolution or because capitalism was preparing to die, but because the Communists listened to the American people and adapted their programs to fit the needs of America, regardless of what the official CPUSA party line was or what the Comintern was instructing them to do. America was inherently different from not only Russia, but also from

[134] Ottanell, 40; Babson, 64.

[135] John H.M. Laslett, "Review: Giving Superhuman a Human Face: American Communism and the Automobile Workers in the 1930s," *Review in American History,* 9, no. 1 (March, 1981): 116; Ottanelli, 49.

Europe, yet the Communists here were able to find different avenues for Marxist growth, and they did not stray that far from Marx or Engels.[136]

Engels stated that Communism would be difficult to build in America because "he saw clearly that the bigness, uniqueness, success, and freshness of the American Experiment had created a collective state of mind unusually hostile to comprehensive radicalism."[137] Difficult, perhaps, but not impossible. Engels recognized that there would need to be different goals and tactics, and even stated that by using the government to pass labor legislation, that a democratic nation could work toward the goal of Communism because it was demanded and obtained by the workers, with their own interest in mind. He also thought that such legislation could help to destroy competition inherent in capitalism and to help the workers change the system.[138]

Karl Marx also spoke of ways in which building Communism in a democratic nation could be achieved differently than in a more repressed nation. In a speech given at The Hague in 1872, Marx stated that "in North America barricades are unnecessary, because there, if only they want to, the proletariat can win victory at the polls."[139] The Communists in America proved that they were trying to work within the democratic system in America and not trying to overthrow it because of the very fact that they repeatedly participated in it. Foster himself ran for president numerous times throughout the 1920s and 1930s on the Communist Party ticket, and the Communists in the auto industry repeatedly called for a labor party to support the specific needs of the workers in America. The Communists stated in 1923 that "in America, the cutting edge of

---

[136] Leonard B. Rosenberg, "The 'Failure' of the Socialist Party of America," *The Review of Politics,* 31, no. 3 (July, 1969): 331-332.

[137] Clinton Rossiter, *Marxism: The View From America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960), 5.

[138] W.F. Rappard, "Karl Marx and Labor Legislation," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics,* 27, no. 3 (May, 1913): 532.

[139] Bertram D. Wolfe, "Lenin had Trouble with Engels," *Russian Review,* 15, no. 3 (July, 1956): 200; Lenore O'Boyle, "The German Independent Socialists During the First World War," *The American Historical Review,* 56, no. 4 (July, 1951): 824-825.

the revolutionary movement will have to be a political party, not because the state is important, but because the people think the state is important."[140]

The reason that the auto workers called for their own party was because they were not getting results from any of the political parties that were in the running, and that included the New Deal Democrats of the 1930s. The fact that the American Communists went against the Comintern and did not call for a violent revolution but worked to change the country in a way that the American workers could understand and rally behind showed that they were not blindly following orders from the USSR and Stalin. In addition, the fact that they worked for a labor party and not only ran their own candidates, but supported Farm-Labor Candidates, instead of simply supporting the liberal government in place during the Popular Front showed that they had a mind of their own and were listening to the workers.[141]

Another clear sign that American Communism differed from world Communism is seen in the fact that many foreign members of the Communist Party had a hard time fitting into American Communism. They had to let go of their old concerns and come to terms with the political structure of American Communism and its overall goal for trade unionism and helping the average worker. This was especially true in automotive cities, such as Detroit.[142]

Overall the American Communists were careful to listen to the workers' needs, fight for better working conditions and to help the workers in ways that other political groups or unions were not willing to help. The Communists were good trade unionists and organizers, and this is why many autoworkers were comfortable working with them and supporting them, identifying

---

[140] "Lessons of the Economic Struggles, Tasks of the Communists in the Trade Union," *The Communist,* 13, no. 5 (May, 1934), 44, Jack Barbash Collection Series III, Box 70, Folder: Communist Publications, Walter Reuther Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

[141] Laslett, "Review," 116; Herbert Zam, "A Labor Party and Socialism," *American Socialist Monthly,* 5, no. 8 (December, 1936), 34, Jack Barbash Collection Series III, Box 70, Folder: American Socialist Monthly, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

[142] Keeran, "Labour," 199.

the fact that the Communists main goal was helping the workers, and this was very true among the autoworkers during the 1920s and 1930s. Today, the UAW itself does not hide the fact that its roots were planted in what it defines as the "left wing" and claim that it owes much to those men because to them the union always came first and "political beliefs were secondary."[143]

The Socialists

The Socialist Party was seen as a less radical alternative to the Communist Party once the 'left wing' had split in 1919. There were, however, many more differences between the Socialist Party and the Communist Party, especially in regards to the drive to unionize the auto industry. By their own admission, the Socialists in America never achieved any great success, mostly because they were unwilling to adapt to the workers' needs or American political ideals. Unlike the Communist Party, during the 1930s the Socialists did not focus on the economic struggles of the workers but rather on politics and elections. Their ultimate goal was not improving the situation of the worker but to rally the workers behind a socialist economy, and this proved difficult for them to do in America.[144]

The Socialist Party also suffered from a great disconnect with the autoworkers and marketed itself as a much more educated and elitist group. For example, the shop papers that the AWU distributed under the Socialist Party's influence were too long, expensive, and written in a language that most of the autoworkers could not relate to or understand. In the eyes of most American workers, the only thing that the Socialists seemed to be promoting was Socialism, which was an idea that went against American freedoms and individualism.[145]

---

[143] Anthony, 11.

[144] Haim Kantorontch, "The Socialist Party and the Trade Unions," *American Socialist Monthly,* 4, no. 3 (November, 1935), 41, Jack Barbash Collection Series III, Box 70, Folder: American Socialist Monthly, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.; Keeran, "Labour," 192.

[145] Rosenberg, 333-334.

Perhaps most damaging to the success of the Socialist Party in the auto unions during the 1930s was its unwillingness to work with other parties in the system. Unlike the Communists, who welcomed all into their cause to unionize, the Socialists worked hard to keep other groups out, specifically the Communists. At one point during the trade union drive Earl Browder of the CPUSA wrote a letter to the Socialist Party leaders asking for the Socialists working in the auto industry to join a popular front with the Communists. The request was summarily rejected.[146] The Socialist Party did not promote unity and solidarity in the auto union like the Communists did and was actually very vocal about its anti-Communist stand, and even its own leaders recognized the fact that this negativism was hurting its popularity and progress within the auto union movement. "It is not the duty of revolutionary Socialists to drive the Communists out of the labor movement. They cannot be driven out because they are part of it."[147]

The Socialist Party, although seemingly more right wing and paletable to the American consciousness than Communism, was unflexible and unwilling to listen to the workers or take control of the unions. Socialists spent too much time writing and promoting socialistic ideals and not enough time acting. As one Socialist activist stated, "if we don't assume the leadership, the Communists will…[we] talk like heroes and act like cowards."[148] The Socialists were so afraid of being red baited and lumped together with the Communists that they acted very little amongst the workers, claiming "the Socialist Party is not a Communist Party; we do not want to

[146] "Letter to Earl Browder, Gen. Sec. of CPUSA from Clarence Senor Ex. Sec. of the Socialist Party of America, February 19, 1935," The Wayne County AFL-CIO Collection Series I, Part I, Box 17, Folder: Socialist Party 1932-1935, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

[147] Haim Kantorontch, "Notes on the United Front Problem," *American Socialist Monthly,* 5, no. 3 (May, 1936), 9, Jack Barbash Collection Series III, Box 70, Folder: American Socialist Monthly, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

[148] Kantorontch, "The Socialist Party," 34.

control unions or dictate to them, nor do we want to mix into their inner affairs."[149] Thus, the Socialist Party was unable to obtain support among the autoworkers or labor in general.[150]

During the Sit-Down Strike there were Socialists involved in the movement, and they were so involved because they decided to work with the Communists in Flint to achieve victory. Some of these Socialist leaders would continue on to lead the United Auto Workers once the Communists were expelled at the end of the decade. One such Socialist leader was Walter Reuther, and although he and his brothers Victor and Roy played important roles in the Flint strike of 1936, they were not the leaders or the organizers. The Socialist Party itself identified that the Socialists in Flint were involved in the strike but not at a high level. Hy Fish stated "the party entered auto late. We entered during [the] strike, having no previous base in the union."[151] After the Flint strike, the Socialist Party red baited the Communist leaders and worked to separate the autoworkers from the Communist Party and align the history with the Socialist Party.[152] The Socialist labor leaders, such as Walter Reuther, would eventually even distance themselves from the Socialist Party as they rose to power within the UAW. Reuther would continue to promote Socialism abroad but made it clear that in America he believed that capitalism worked best. Much of this rhetoric was due to the pressures coming from the CIO and John L. Lewis, who continually called for the support of Democratic leaders such as FDR and not for a Farm-Labor party or Socialist candidate.[153]

---

[149] Kantorontch, "The Socialist Party," 34.
[150] Rosenberg, 347.
[151] Keeran, *Communism,* 164.
[152] Kantorontch, "The Socialist Party," 43.
[153] Murray Seidler, "The Socialist Party and American Unionism," *Midwest Journal of Political Science,* 5, no. 3 (August, 1961): 225-226, 223.

The Proletariats

A more regional political group that developed mostly in Michigan during the Great Depression was the Proletariat Party. This was a small group but one that was also involved in the autoworkers movement, especially in the city of Flint. Much like the Socialist Party, it was more intellectually based, establishing workers school and Proletariat Universities. It was a quiet group, with numbers estimated at about one hundred members in Flint, yet many of the leaders were identified by Flint strikers as ones who introduced them to Communist or Socialist ideas.

The group itself split from the Michigan Socialist Party in 1918 at their convention in Detroit. There was a big dispute about whether the party should support a paper entitled *The Proletarian*, which many Socialists viewed as too left wing and radical. One side, known as the 'yellows', were against it and were the less militant, while the other side, known as the 'reds', were for it and were considered more radical. At the convention, the 'yellows' won, but afterwards the 'reds' met in secret at midnight and decided to leave the party and form their own party, known as 'The Proletarian University of America.' All three of the Socialist Party representatives from Flint were members of the 'reds'. For a short time the Proletariats joined the Communists but were expelled after one month for being too right wing, or 'mensheviks'.[154]

Overall, the Proletariat Party disagreed with many of the policies of the Socialists and the Communists and worked to educate the workers and create class consciousness. While there is little information about their work among the autoworkers, from interviews conducted with those involved in the unionization of Flint, many of the Proletariat leaders were identified as supporters of the strike and as working with the Communist labor leaders to bring about victory for the workers. One such leader was Lorne Herrlich, who owned Herrlich's Pharmacy in Flint.

[154] "Socialist Meeting, 9-18-18," The Government Military Investigations—Auto Industry, Folder 11, Detroit: Socialists and Radicals and Flint Socialist Meeting, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.; Keeran, "Labour," 193.

He was one of the initial three Socialists from Flint and was noted by Bob Travis as donating over $60,000 worth of medicine to the strikers. He was also mentioned by Simmons as a distributor of the *Daily Worker*.[155]

The New Deal Democrats

With the election of FDR in 1932, many autoworkers and laborers in general embraced the Democratic Party with hopes of change. However, by the 1936 election the hope that many workers had carried to polls in 1932 had changed to disillusionment and despair as many New Deal programs did not deliver the change that the workers were promised, specifically in the auto industry. The autoworkers felt as though they were ignored and even betrayed by FDR, the New Deal, and the AFL.[156]

One of the most touted New Deal programs was the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) which was supposed to deliver workers the right to unionize and increase their bargaining power. Yet, in the end, the NIRA turned out to be an auto manufacturer's tool and an ineffective force fighting for the workers. The auto giants, such as General Motors, used the NIRA codes to increase the number of company unions, which were simply chosen and controlled by management within the plant.[157]

Part of the problem revolved around the fact that the NIRA codes were written by the largest manufacturers and were then approved by the AFL, which did not represent the rank and file auto workers. The union argued that by the end of 1933 the NIRA codes had helped to increase GM profits by five thousand percent, all while the working conditions for their employees got much worse. The regulations that the NIRA was supposed to enforce were

---

[155] Henry Lein, interview by Kenneth West, 30 August 1979, transcript, Labor History Project, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.; Travis and Killinger, interview; Simmons, interview.

[156] Hugh T. Lovin, "The Automobile Workers Unions and the Fight for Labor Parties in the 1930s," *Indiana Magazine of History,* 77, no. 2 (1981): 123.

[157] Foster, *American Trade Unionism,*196; Barnard, 45.

greatly ignored by the manufacturers, and they only abided by those which would benefit them. Most autoworkers could "cite enough industrial evasions of the NIRA to suggest that large numbers of laborers and unions had been deprived of those benefits which the NIRA regulatory system was designed to bestow. Noting instances where employers treated the law as a 'scrap of paper'."[158]

When the NIRA was first instated there was a huge organization drive among workers all over the U.S.; however, once the workers realized that their efforts were being thwarted by the manufacturers, there was a great swell of strikes. From 1933-1934, in the auto industry in particular, there was a massive strike movement in direct response to the ineffectiveness of the NIRA.[159] Many autoworkers took to calling the NIRA the "National Run Around" because it was so impotent. Most autoworkers gave up on the New Deal program and decided to take matters into their own hands, striking for their rights. Any worker who was caught organizing a union outside of the company union was usually fired and blacklisted, regardless of the law. This was true at the Fisher plants in Flint, Michigan, where many men cited being fired because of union activity.[160]

Once these men were fired, the government tried to put a system into place that would help them to get rehired and would hold the employers accountable for their anti-union tactics, but this system proved in and of itself to be highly unsuccessful as well. The National Labor Board, and subsequently the Auto Labor Board, were set up as an appeal process for fired workers. Many times the workers appealed to the board, and the board ordered the

---

[158] Lovin, 125; A.B. Magil,,"The Flint Auto Strike," 17.

[159] Foster, *American Trade Unionism*, 197.

[160] Lovin, 126; "The Case of the Progressives Against Smith's Expulsion and Splitting Drive in the MESA, 1934-1935," 7, Nat Ganley Collection, Box 34, Folder 19, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State Univesity, Detroit, MI.; Minute Book from Local 18331-Fisher Body #1, 1933-1934, Al Cook Collection, Box 3, Folder 1, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

manufacturers to rehire the men, and the manufacturers summarily ignored the board. Then what occurred was that the fired worker would then have to petition the board a second time, waiting not only for a hearing, but then weeks and months for another decision. By this point many of the men had been forced to look for work in another industry or had already lost their homes. These men often wrote letters to FDR as a last ditch attempt to try to salvage their lives and save their families.[161] Manufacturers like GM found ways to paralyze the boards and to forestall their decisions by using court injunctions issued by GM favored judges.[162]

Roosevelt was also damaged in the eyes of the autoworkers because of his consistent ties with the AFL, who had continually ignored the auto industry's drive toward industrial unionization. The AFL was opposed to striking, which seemed to be the only viable outlet for the autoworkers once it was clear that their bosses were not going to abide by the New Deal programs.[163] The final nail in the coffin of the New Deal and AFL image among the autoworkers came in response to the great strike wave of 1933 and 1934 with the agreement they reached with the auto manufactures in March of 1934. Amazingly the deal was negotiated by the government and the AFL without regards to the rank and file workers, and it left them all feeling betrayed.

The deal reached in 1934 solidified the company unions and forced the massive groups of autoworkers striking for better wages and working conditions, along with the right to choose their own union outside of the company, to give up their strikes, and go back to work. The agreement also included a 'merit clause' which stated that in the auto industry the employers

[161] Minute Book from Local 18331; Letter from C.E. Edgley in Flint to President FDR, October 4, 1934, Labor History Project, Box 1, Folder: Franklin D. Roosevelt Library Harry L. Hopkins Papers—FERA Papers, Box 58, University of Michigan, Flint, MI.; Magil, 17.

[162] Rosenberg, 14.

[163] Barnard, 48, Collins of the AFL once said "I never voted for a strike in my life. I have always been opposed to them."

could fire or promote anyone they wanted based only on their own perceived standards of merit, irregardless to union activity. In so many words, they could fire anyone for any reason. The agreement also stated that if outside unions were formed by the men that they should be given proportional representation with management. This was the divide and conquer strategy that the manufacturers used against the autoworkers. Any union could be formed, and if there were fifteen unions in one shop, they would have fifteen representatives sitting down with management. With so many cooks in the kitchen it would be impossible for any agreement to be reached and the management would always win in the end.[164]

The AFL-FDR deal of 1934 did not end the militancy of the autoworkers, and the strikes around the industry continued, mostly in defiance of this agreement. Other groups also used this to their advantage, like the Communists, who pointed out how the autoworkers had been betrayed by the government and the AFL who were interested in helping capitalist business more than the workers. The economy, they argued, was on an upswing, and FDR was trying to kill the autoworkers strike movement because a slow down of industry would have hurt the economy. The autoworkers also began to feel that the AFL saw this as an opportunity to destroy the industrial unionization drive in auto. This did in fact hurt the unionization of the industry, as autoworkers left their unions in droves. When the UAW came into Flint in 1936, they found merely a shell of a union left, and the few left were mostly company spies. None of the workers trusted the AFL or FDR and the New Deal.[165]

[164] Levinson, 57-58, 61-62; Barnard, 50; Babson, 75.

[165] Magil, 17; Open Letter to the Delegates of the National Conference of Federal Auto Locals of the AFL, June, 1934, 1, Henry Kraus Collection, Box 1, Folder 1-15: Auto Workers' Union; Report on Flint, December, 1933, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

One auto labor leader claimed "and there have come also the beginnings of disillusionment with capitalism's savior, Roosevelt."[166] While this may seem an overly dramatic statement, it was indeed the feeling of the rank and file autoworker after the failed NIRA and the 1934 deal. When the time came for the first official UAW convention as part of the CIO in 1935, one issue on the agenda was the decision of which candidate to endorse in the 1936 election. While FDR would seem to be labor's favorite, the autoworkers voted to endorse the Farm-Labor Party candidate instead of FDR—a direct statement about whom they trusted and who they felt had their best interest at heart. Of course, John L. Lewis had promised FDR that he and the New Deal would have the support of labor, and this included the autoworkers young union. So, Lewis informed the delegates that they needed to take another vote, because if they did not endorse FDR the CIO would not be able to supply them with the $100,000 that they so desperately needed for their organizational drive. The young, poor union fell into line behind Lewis and endorsed FDR, but its original vote stood as a testament to how it truly felt about the New Deal Democrats.[167]

Conclusion

By looking at the policies of the Communist Party in regards to the autoworkers in relation to those by the other major political parties and unions during the 1930s, it is clear to see that the rank and file autoworker would have been more apt to support a movement such as Communism. The other parties and unions of the day had their own interests in mind, not the best interest of the workers. Repeatedly the autoworkers were abandoned, betrayed, or ignored by the Socialists, the New Deal Democrats, and the AFL, while the Communist Party and their industrial unions supported their strikes and listened to their needs, all while pointing out the

[166] Magil, 18.
[167] Barnard, 71; Howe, 52-53; Lovin, "The Automobile Workers Unions."

inequities of the other parties. The Communist Party also focused on the needs of the workers, supporting them through unemployment all while teaching them how to organize and unionize democratically.

With all of this support, it may seem hard to understand why the autoworkers would not readily join the Communist Party or openly declare their allegiance with such an organization. However, because of red-baiting, fascist hate groups, and the eventual Cold War, most hid and then abandoned the bond that they shared with the Communist Party. Even though, time and time again the autoworkers turned away from Socialism, fascism, and New Deal rhetoric, and in their own way endorsed American Communist ideas, once they were faced with open red-baiting techniques, violence prescribed by such groups as the Black Legion, and the Cold War politics that invaded the auto unions, many denounced and forgot their Communist beginnings.

CHAPTER 4

THE FORCES MOUNTED AGAINST THE STRIKERS

There is no doubt the impact that the Communist Party and their sympathizers had on the autoworkers and the unionization of the auto industry. Why then were there so many who refused to admit their alignment with the Communist movement during the Sit-Down Strike in Flint? The truth is that there were many reasons for the autoworkers to be afraid of anyone suspecting them of working with the Communists, some that threatened their life and others their livelihood. The prejudices that existed, and still exist today, in America against Communists and left-wing radicals created an atmosphere of hostility in the UAW before, during, and after the Sit-Down Strike.

The major threat to the Communists' safety that existed before and during the 1930s was the Black Legion. The legend states the Black Legion would dress in long black robes with pirate hats embellished with skulls and crossbones, meeting in the middle of the night in an open field, reciting secret oaths and making blood pacts.[168] For many auto workers during the 1930s, this figure was nothing they personally encountered, and most remembered the Black Legionnaire as nothing more than a boogie man figure. These figures, however, did in fact exist in Flint during the 1930s, and even though many Flint sit-down strikers did not admit any personal encounter, they knew what they stood against, and that they existed as a real threat to them and their drive to unionize the auto industry and General Motors. The mere existence of such a violent, anti-Communist group, would have instilled fear into the hearts of all union men, adding to the hostile atmosphere against the autoworkers one ally—the Communist Party.

[168] Michael S. Clinansmith, "The Black Legion: Hooded Americanism in Michigan," *Michigan History,* LV, no. 3 (Fall, 1971), 252.

The Black Legion is somewhat of a mystery, even today. Little has been written on the secretive organization. There are many who believe that the Black Legion ideas were not short-lived, that after Legionaires were made public, they simply merged into different organizations, changing their name but not their objectives. The lack of information and the absence of immediate deep investigation into the group suggests that there may have been so much more to this organization than originally meets the eye. Were there powerful forces behind the Black Legion such as politicians or auto manufacturers that worked to brush the group's activities and secrets under the rug? And why did it flourish in and around the industrial auto manufacturing centers but nowhere else? Whatever the answers to these questions may be, there is no doubt that the Black Legion struck fear in the hearts of the auto workers in Michigan, and that their existence would have caused strikers to hide any affiliation they may have had with the union, left-wing groups, and most specifically, Communism.[169]

The Black Legion appeared to have been born out of the New Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s, even though the KKK at the time strongly refuted this claim.[170] The original founder is believed to have been Dr. William Jacob Shepard, a Grand Cyclops of the KKK in Ohio. Shepard supposedly wanted to spice up the Klan and find a way to attract new members. Somewhere between 1924 and 1925 he recruited a small band of men under his jurisdiction and they all dyed their Klan robes black. The group also added a pirate like hat and skulls and crossbones to the ensemble, making them look even more dark and sinister. Shepard put together a program of secret initiation rituals, and his group stopped participating in public Klan

[169] "Evans Backs War on Black Legion," *The Kourier* (June, 1936), James Lindahl Collection, Acc. No. 1061, Box 7, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI. There was no report of Black Legion activity in the south.

[170] Dr. Evans, of the KKK, stated in the *Kourier*, "I resent the use of the name of the Klan and the cowardly attempts of interested parties to shift the responsibility for their evil acts or the non-performance of their sworn duties to us," 113.

demonstrations and parades down mainstreet. Shepard believed that the Klan had gone too mainstream, that the original appeal of a secret organization was gone, and that was why the KKK was losing members. By making everything dark and secretive, he believed more men would be drawn into the organization, and he was right.[171]

Shepard's group came to be known as the Black Guard but was still part of the active KKK. In 1925 the Black Guard appeared at a Konclave gathering and were given the job of guarding the barrels used to collect member dues. The other Klan members in attendance were intrigued by the secretive new group, and Shepard later claimed that he had so many interested in forming their own Black Guards that the leaders of the Klan became jealous of his popularity, prompting them to boot the Black Guards from the KKK. The Black Guards then became known as Black Knight Riders and finally, towards 1930-1931, they were the Black Legion.[172]

The Black Legion under Shepard was quite different from the Black Legion which would emerge in the 1930s under new leadership; however, all of their rituals and traditions would stay the same. Shepard's Black Legion was based on the same beliefs and targeted the same enemies as the New KKK of the 1920s: African Americans, Jews, Catholics, Communists, and immigrants. As the Legion switched leaders in 1932 to a man named Virgil H. Effinger (known as Bert) from Lima, Ohio, the group took on a much more militant Americanist attitude. Effinger was also a former KKK member, but the group was now moving farther away from their KKK roots, focusing more on immigrant and radical infiltration of the industrial manufacturing centers, such as Lima, Ohio. Effinger kept the vision of Shepard as a 'father-

[171] Peter Amann, "Vigilante Fascism: The Black Legion as an American Hybrid," *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 25, no.3 (July, 1983): 493.

[172] Amann, 493, 496; Will Lissner, "Black Legion's Spread Surprising to Midwest," *New York Times,* 5 31-3), IV:6.

figure' to the group, and they continued to focus on private rituals, especially night riding and terrorism.[173]

The Black Legion had always had a militaristic structure, yet Effinger took this structure to a new extreme when he assumed control. The men were divided into companies of ninety-nine men; then there were four companies to a battalion and four battalions to a regiment. Each man was also given a rank (foot legion, night riders, black knights, armed guards, bullet club). There were also elite units, many of which carried out the most horrible crimes of murder committed by the Black Legion. The Legion also worked hard in the beginning to recruit men who were 'violent' in nature, such as military men (particularly National Guardsmen), police officers, prison guards, etc. [174]

The Black Legion under Effinger began to spread outside of Ohio, especially north into Michigan, where there were an abundance of industrial workers merging with Southern white immigrants and foreign immigrants as well. The existence of Southern white workers in Detroit and Flint gave the Black Legion a base to start from, seeing as many of these men were already open to KKK beliefs and may have even been members of the KKK already. At the time Michigan had the largest acknowledged KKK membership of any state, with 875,000 members. Making the leap from the KKK to the Black Legion was simple, and having their jobs threatened by incoming foreign immigrants also provided fertile ground for hatred.[175]

The exact date that the Black Legion spread into Michigan is not known, but most accounts place its migration somewhere in the middle of 1933. Isaac (Peg-Leg) White was a former Detroit Police Officer who had met Effinger at a conference in Ohio in 1931; they both decided that Detroit was prime for a group such as the Black Legion to flourish. White was the

[173] Amann, 494-503.
[174] Amann, 504.
[175] Forrest Davis, "Labor Spies and the Black Legion," *The New Republic,* 6-17-36, 171; Lissner.

perfect person to work for Effinger and recruit new members. He had lost a leg while involved in an auto accident while on duty as a policeman. Therefore, he no longer needed to work and he received a healthy pension of $104 a month from the city of Detroit. He was free to focus all his time and attention on the Legion and its activities. As part of the city of Detroit he had grown to dislike the union organizers, whom he saw as radicals that were coming in and threatening American freedom. He worked with Henry Ford's notorious 'service department'[176] as a part of their citizen's committee, which was responsible for collecting the names of Communists in the factories and turning them over to management. White was quite proud of this work and stated to the newspaper that he "called on all the plants of Detroit. Once or twice I turned in a bunch of names to the Hudson Motor Car Company. How many I don't remember but there were several."[177]

White used the Black Legion's KKK roots to recruit new men in Detroit in the beginning, convincing many of them that this was a KKK affiliated group. Once they were in, they were then set about the task of recruiting their own members. The Legion had many different ways in which they acquired new members. One was by simply playing off their fear and hatred of Communist infiltration of America, aiming their hatred mostly at immigrants coming in to steal their jobs during the Depression. One Black Legion recruiter in Detroit, Arthur Lupp, stated "you must remember that during the depression there was this condition: many men were depressed. They had no purpose in life. They were floundering around. This organization gave them an interest in life."[178] There is no doubt that the Legion gave the men not only an interest in life, but an object of their anger and a face to blame for their plight in life. A few of the

[176] Henry Ford's Service Department was the name of Ford's anti-union police force that he had working against the union and their expansion into his factories.

[177] "Plant Visit Admitted," *The Detroit News,* 6- 2-36; Amann, 505.

[178] Lissner.

known Black Legion former members later claimed that they joined because there was nothing wrong with the idea of hating Communists, and that they were also drawn to the rituals, secret meetings, and mystique of it all.[179]

Another recruiting tactic used by the Black Legion in Michigan was that they created a network in which the organization controlled employment in the community. The Black Legion would first recruit politicians and local leaders to join by promising them the votes of the organization (which had grown quite quickly in many communities, such as Pontiac). Once they had the politicians, they would have local jobs, especially those controlled by New Deal organizations or local boards, only reserved for Black Legion members. This employment ring was vital to the Black Legion's survival during the Great Depression, when many men would do whatever it took to have a job. They also strong-armed and threatened business management to hire Black Legion members and fire union organizers and suspected Communists.[180]

The Black Legion was known as the common man's organization, which helped to separate it from the KKK which had fallen from grace by the 1930s due to internal corruption. The Black Legion only charged a ten cent a month optional due, and the leaders of the group, such as Shepard and Effinger, never lived lavish lifestyles or profited from the group. The Black Legion also had a lot of front organizations which were well respected throughout the community, allowing its members to also claim membership to these important social clubs. One such club, The Wolverine Republican Club, claimed as its members all the men who would later be tried for murder in Detroit as part of the Black Legion.[181]

---

[179] Clinansmith, 252; "86 in Oakland Named by Grand Jury as Black Legion Members," *The Detroit News,* 9-1-36, 14, Wyndham Mortimer Collection, Acc. No. 1171, Box 2, Folder 9: Black Legion Clippings, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

[180] Clinansmith, 248, 251; Lissner; George Morris, *The Black Legion Rides* (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1936), 9.

[181] Amann, 499; Morris, 7; Clinansmith, 254.

Probably the most successful form of recruitment for the Black Legion was also the most underhanded and sinister: forced enrollment. Many Black Legion members told of how they were tricked into joining the secret organization. Some men went to the initiation ceremony willingly, believing that it was a harmless group aimed at preserving American freedoms, while others were lured to a poker game or a hunting expedition, only to find themselves on their knees in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by men in black robes with a pistol to their head. There are many accounts of the initiation ceremony, and all of them tell the same story. The new initiates were blind-folded, so as to not know their location. They were often times led into the middle of the woods late at night, or to a member's dark basement. Once there the blind fold was removed, yet all they could see were men around them dressed from head to toe in black, their identities concealed. Next they were directed to kneel down in the center of the group, at which time the leader would come up behind them and place a pistol on the back of their head, while another member poked one in their ribs, pointed at their heart. The new recruit was then forced at gunpoint to recite the oath, part of which stated "In the name of God and the Devil, one to reward and the other to punish, I pledge that I will exert every possible means in my power to the extermination of the anarchist, Communist, the Roman hierarchy and the arbiters."[182]

The forcible initiation of Black Legion members added to its solidarity and intrigue. Many of the men found themselves out in the middle of the woods, surrounded by armed, hooded strangers, and forced to pledge allegiance to the group. Once in the Black Legion many found it difficult to get out, even if they wanted to or they had not been successfully indoctrinated in the organization's beliefs. Once in the group they were forced to purchase a firearm (many of which were sold to them by the Black Legion leaders). They were also given a bullet on initiation night that they were to carry with them at all times, not just as a means of

[182] "The Black Legion," *New York Times,* 5-31-36, IV:1; Amann, 496, 498, 508; Morris, 5, 9.

identifying fellow Black Legion members, but also as a reminder. They were told when receiving that bullet that the leader of the group had an identical matching bullet which would be used to kill them if they divulged the group's secrets, refused an order, or stepped out of line in any way. After such a frightful initiation ceremony the new initiate would certainly not question the group's seriousness or ability to conduct violence. New initiates also had to memorize all the different codes and gestures for the group, since speaking openly about ones membership was forbidden.[183]

Even though the Black Legion claimed a long list of enemies, much like the KKK, the Black Legion in Michigan seemed to specifically target suspected Communists who had direct ties to the union and labor organization. While Michigan State Police records indicate that there may have been as many as fifty murders in the Detroit and Flint areas linked to the Black Legion, most of these went unpunished. There were two major murders in the Detroit area that were directly linked to the Black Legion, that of George Marchuk and John Bielak. Marchuk was the Secretary-Treasurer of the Auto Workers Union (a well known Communist union) and he was found murdered in Lincoln Park, a suburb of Detroit, in December of 1933. The AWU went before the city council and made a plea for an investigation into the murder, stating that they knew the secret anti-labor organization was behind it. Their requests were ignored and only in 1936 was there a direct link made between the murder of Marchuk, Isaac White, and the Black Legion.[184]

John Bielak was a member of the AFL (through the new UAW) and he was found beaten to death in Monroe, Michigan in March of 1934. Bielak was found with union applications

[183] Morris, 7; Clinansmith, 254.

[184] Davis, 170-171; Morris, 4, 12; Clinansmith, 255, Claims that Prosecutor Ricca found "a string of attempted assassinations of public figures and the murders or attempted murders of labor organizers, political or other rivals, and black workers in the Detroit area."

under his head, meaning his was probably murdered while trying to recruit union members. Isaac White was later identified in Bielak's murder as well by a witness from Ford who stated that White had come to him and identified Bielak as a Communist. Many union organizers began to fear for their lives after the murder of Bielak, "convinced that the slain man was the victim of the terrorists."[185]

Many of the crimes associated with the Black Legion were not murders, simply acts of violence and destruction against union organizers, such as intimidation of strikers' families during strikes. Sometimes Black Legionaires beat auto workers involved in unionization or threw sticks of dynamite at their cars. Others saw their farms and homes burnt to the ground in the middle of the night. Many times the victims of Black Legion destruction would find that the police were not interested in investigating the crime. When one man's barn was burnt to the ground the police did not comb the area for suspects but dug through the rubble looking for Communist literature.[186]

The terrorist group targeted many labor unions through spy infiltration. Black Legion members were sent into the unions to spy and bring them down, either by causing internal friction and corruption, or by identifying the members and releasing the information to management. Frank X. Martell of the Detroit Federation of Labor said "we have wondered what has caused the friction in the labor movement of the state in past few years. I have sensed these

[185] "Cult Job Seen in 1932 Killing: Victim at Meeting on Night of Death," NP, ND, Wyndham Mortimer Collection, Acc. No. 1171, Box 2, Folder 9: Black Legion Clippings, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.; Davis, 170.

[186] Morris, 16, 18; "86 in Oakland,"; "Untitled Newspaper Story on Black Legion," NP, 11-30—12- 1-68, The Maurice Sugar Collection, Acc. No. 232, Box 1, Folder 19, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.; "Personal Note on Black Legion," ND, The Maurice Sugar Collection, Acc. No. 232, Box 1, Folder 4, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.; Weinstone, interview; Will Lissner, "Black Legion Thug Confesses Murder," *New York Times* 6-4-3, 1:4.

things when unions would withdraw suddenly…undoubtedly the Black Legion has been in the back of these things."[187]

The Black Legion's most notorious murder in Michigan was that of Charles Poole, which brought the organization to national attention in 1936. Poole was not a Communist nor a union organizer. He was someone that a Black Legion member had a particular grudge against because he was a Catholic and had married a member's sister. The group made up a story that Poole had been beating his pregnant wife, which initiated their original violence against him; however, that claim was later proven false. The Poole murder brought sixteen Black Legion members to justice in Detroit along with national condemnation for the organization. Many political leaders were found to have ties to the Black Legion (specifically in Oakland County, right outside of Detroit). Some historians argue that this public trial signaled the end of the Black Legion late in 1936 (before the Sit-Down Strike); however, there is much evidence to suggest that the real leaders of the Black Legion, and most of its members remained strong after the Poole trial, going even further underground and then changing the name of their organization.[188]

The survival of the Black Legion's leaders and members after their public ousting in 1936 is a very important issue when trying to gauge their effect on the Flint autoworkers involved in the 1936-1937 Sit-Down Strike. Was the terrorist organization destroyed by the Poole trial and investigation or were they still around to threaten union leaders and Communist sympathizers? There are many indications that the Legion did survive past 1936, morphing into other organizations, most prominently one called the Patriot League of America, which was

[187] Morris, 17.

[188] "No Title," *The Detroit News,* 2-2-38, Wyndham Mortimer Collection, Acc. No. 1171, Box 2, Folder 9: Black Legion Clippings, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.; Clinansmith, 260; "Oakland Legion Jury Names 86: Accused State Employees Face Dismissal," *The Detroit News,* 9-1-36, Wyndham Mortimer Collection, Acc. No.1171, Box 2, Folder 9: Black Legion Clippings, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI. The trials lasted until December and January (in different areas around the state of Michigan).

begun by the Black Legion's own leader Effinger. This new organization was a little different from the Black Legion: it allowed Catholics (like Poole had been) to join, and their primary target became Communists. The Patriotic League continued to target Michigan for members, charging five dollars nationally to join but only three dollars in Michigan. Effinger also openly admitted that most of the Patriotic League's members were former Black Legion members.[189]

The Legion's activities continued and their hatred of labor organizers and Communists remained because the situation in Michigan was not changing in their favor in 1936, it was just the opposite. The UAW and the CIO had moved in around the labor industry and were gaining momentum in their union drive. This would be the time for anti-labor organizations to increase their activity, not diminish. Labor unions and their supporters believed that the Black Legion's following actually continued to grow throughout the Poole trial and investigation, as none of the leaders of the terrorist group were brought to justice or identified. Forrest Davis of the *New Republic* wrote during the Poole trial "let no one make the mistake of believing that the incarceration of Dean and Davis, the displacing and reprimand of minor office-holders and the public scorn heaped upon the Black Legion will expunge from this community the backward sentiments dramatized by the Legion."[190]

The Legionnaires themselves even came out publically to announce that they were not going away just because of the Poole investigation. A section of the group in Detroit sent a letter to a labor organization in June of 1936, right in the midst of the Poole investigation, and stated, "Whereas some seditious persons have seen fit to call a meeting to protest the Patriotic Acts of the so-called Black Legion, be it known <u>that a state of Civil War</u> exists in this city, county and

[189] Amann, 521; "Calls Effiinger Legion Head: Ernest Says He Leads New Order," NP 3-8- ?, Wyndham Mortimer Collection, Acc. No. 1171, Box 2, Folder 9: Black Legion Clippings, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

[190] Davis, 171.

state, which will continue to exist till the alien and subversive elements are exterminated or until the last patriot is dead. P.S. The Black Legion is only the little finger of the fist raised against you."[191] It is simple to understand why many labor organizers and Communist sympathizers in Michigan did not see the Poole investigation as the end of the Black Legion but as a raise in the stakes and heightened sense of hostility between the two sides.

The Black Legion's activities were not simply centered around Detroit, although most of the information documenting the Black Legion comes from that area because of its larger population. The Black Legion (and its affiliates and surviving organizations) also flourished in Flint, Michigan. Some estimate that their membership in Flint was well over two thousand, yet because of the lack of membership records, exact numbers are hard to pin-point. There is no question, however, that the Black Legion was alive and well in Flint during 1936, as six men were also brought to trial there due to Black Legion exposure in Detroit surrounding the Poole investigation. Two of these men, Carl Moore and Teutenberg, admitted to being members of the Black Legion and also stated that Effinger had been to Flint and attended meetings. Teutenberg also confirmed that the initiation ceremony described by those in Detroit was the same in Flint, and that he had promised to not only participate in night-rides but also any call to violence.[192]

The Black Legion leaders continued to speak out in the Flint area, even during the investigations and trials, signaling that the Black Legion was not disappearing in Flint either. A Newspaper clipping from the Flint area during the trials stated that even though the Black Legion

[191] Letter from the Army and Navy Club in Detroit to Conference for the protection of Civil Rights, 12 June 1936, Henry Kraus Collection, Acc. No. 112, Box 7, Folder: Black Legion 7-33, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI. Underlining copied from original letter.

[192] Amann, 506; "Sixth Man Still Being Sought in Black Legion Perjury Case," *The Flint Journal,* 9-8-36, Wyndham Mortimer Collection, Acc. No. 1171, Box 2, Folder 9: Black Legion Clippings, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.; "Ex-Cultists Tell of Revolt Plans: Six Held After Airing of Secrets in Flint," *The Flint Journal* 9-12-36, Wyndham Mortimer Collection, Acc. No. 1171, Box 2, Folder 9: Black Legion Clippings, Walter Reuther Labor Archive at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.; "Activities of Black Legion Revealed on Witness Stand," NP, ND, Wyndham Mortimer Collection, Acc. No. 1171, Box 2, Folder 9: Black Legion Clippings, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

was "believed to have been keeping quietly in the background" they had "come to life in Flint and Genesee County. Almost on the eve of trials for six Flint men accused of perjury in connection with the recent one-man grand jury investigation, a defiant 'Declaration of Principles of the Black Legion has been mailed to circuit judges."[193] This 'Declaration' was mailed from a small suburb of Flint named Durand. The article then continued to list the sixteen principles of the Black Legion, leaving a few to the imagination by simply stating they were "unprintable".

The exact strength of the Black Legion in Flint, apparent as it may seem, was less important than its perceived strength to the union leaders and autoworkers involved in the Sit-Down Strike. Many of them believed that the Black Legion was alive and well in Flint during the organizational drive in the fall of 1936 and the strike itself, causing many to fear reprisal for their union activities and left-wing affiliations. Wyndham Mortimer, the UAW organizer first sent to Flint in June of 1936 to begin the organizational drive, and a well-known Communist, believed very strongly that the Black Legion was after him and other autoworkers. He claimed that the Black Legion was the first to greet him in Flint, that when he arrived at the Dresden hotel he received a phone call and was told to "get the hell back where you came from if you don't want to be carried out in a wooden box."[194] Mortimer claimed that he had no doubt that this threat came directly from the Black Legion.

Robert Travis, the second UAW organizer sent into Flint to replace Mortimer during the fall of 1936, also had a strong belief that the Black Legion not only existed in Flint but was running the city, and that they also targeted him and his fellow labor organizers. During the Sit-Down Strike, Travis claimed to have received a phone call from a distraught man at two in the

[193] "Defiant Declaration Issued Listing Their 'Principles'," NP, ND, Wyndham Mortimer Collection, Acc. No. 1171, Box 2, Folder 9: Black Legion Clippings, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

[194] Mortimer, 104.

morning, claiming that he had been given a gun by the police and told to go and kill Travis. The man claimed he did not want to do this, and so he was informing Travis of this threat. Travis called his fellow organizer Charlie Killinger to come and hear the man's story as well (Killinger confirmed Travis's account). Travis and Killinger then called Governor Murphy to let him know of the threat, which was then relayed to the National Guard in Flint who confronted the Chief of Police and tried to avert any further violence. Travis and Killinger both believed the origin of the threat was the Black Legion.[195]

The union leaders and the autoworkers in Flint thought that the plants themselves were infiltrated by the Black Legion and that the auto manufacturers were very much behind the strength and growth of the organization. It was no secret that Flint was a General Motors town, meaning that the auto giant controlled every aspect of the community, making it the perfect place for the Black Legion to flourish. Mortimer stated that Fisher Body Plant #1 had close to three thousand employees who were also members of the Black Legion. Other strikers involved in the Sit-Down Strike also name certain strikers and members of the union as being Black Legion members and spies (such as Bert Harris). This belief that not only were the city officials, police officers and managers members of the terrorist group, but that their fellow co-workers and strikers were members certainly created an atmosphere of fear among the union members and Communist sympathizers.[196]

The primary question still surrounding the Black Legion is who was really behind its formation, growth, and spread around Michigan? Union organizers such as Mortimer and Travis, along with their supporters, had no doubt that the auto barons were behind the Black Legion. For evidence, they point first of all to the lack of investigation into the Black Legion's

[195] Travis, interview.
[196] Mortimer, 112; Malone, interview; Travis, interview.

illegal activities until 1936 and the death of Poole. Countless murders, arsons, and beatings went down as unsolved simply because the targets were Communists or labor organizers. Until Poole, who was not part of a labor organization, was killed, there was little to no public record of the organization or its activities. Even with the Poole murder only the sixteen men initially tied to the crime were ever brought to trial, while the leaders of the organization remained unknown and free to continue their activities. Union supporters believed wholeheartedly that the Black Legion trials for the Poole murder were used as a way to "whitewash" the organization and protect the "states industrial barons."[197]

Indeed the trials in Detroit and Flint seemed to be a way to quickly deal with the immediate perpetrators and lead the nation to believe that justice had been served and the Black Legion had been destroyed. Looking into the trials themselves it becomes easy to understand where the labor leaders' fears of cover-up came from. First, in Detroit, the Poole trial investigation was led by a one-man Grand Jury, overseen by Judge Chenot, who had distinct ties to Henry Ford. Judge Chenot was the county prosecutor in Detroit during the Ford Hunger March in 1932, and he never charged anyone with the murder of the six unemployed (Communist affiliated) marchers. Chenot was the only one to hear the testimony of the Black Legion members during the Poole investigation, and he made sure that the names of the Black Legion members given during the Grand Jury trial were sealed, protecting those identified by the sixteen men eventually brought to trial.[198] In Flint, six Black Legion members were also brought up on charges, and their case was also assigned to a one-man Grand Jury under Judge Black, who would be found during the Flint Sit-Down Strikes to be the owner of a large sum of GM

[197] Paul W. Ward "Who is Behind the Black Legion?" *The Nation,* 6-10-36, 731; Amann, 519, 521.
[198] Morris, 27-28; Ward, 731.

stock. Judge Black also would not disclose the identities of the Black Legion members named during the Grand Jury or any of their crimes in and around Flint.[199]

To the autoworker in 1936 it certainly made sense that the Black Legion was being sponsored by their own employers, and union members and Communists such as Bud Simons told stories forty years later about how he had personally seen Black Legion uniforms being made and produced in the GM factories in Flint during the night. Henry Kraus also claimed that Nellie Thomas, a floor lady in one of the GM shops, was the one who was making all of the Black Legion robes. The one group of men that benefitted the most from the destruction of the UAW and autoworkers would have been the auto barons, and they had the power, money, and prestige in the Michigan industrial communities to not only recruit men but to also cover up the illegal activities and protect their own identities. Perhaps some of this belief could be excused as frightened autoworkers constructing a conspiracy theory against their number one enemy, yet others also saw a tie between the two. The Governor of Pennsylvania, George H. Earle, attended a meeting in Detroit about the Black Legion during the Poole trial and stated that "the responsibility for this shameless, un-American, barbaric organization rests directly upon the doorsteps of those powerful financial industrial interests" and he specifically named the DuPonts as Black Legion sponsors.[200]

Whether the Black Legion was directly controlled and sponsored by the auto barons is less important than the fact that the autoworkers, labor organizers, and Communist sympathizers believed and feared that it was. The fear that existed surrounding the Black Legion was very real

---

[199] "Activities of Black Legion Revealed on Witness Stand," NP, ND, Wyndham Mortimer Collection, Acc. No. 1171, Box 2, Folder 9: Black Legion Clippings, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.; Will Lissner, "Black Legion Held Wide Lawbreaker," *New York Times* 5-30-36, 1:6.

[200] "Black Legion Laid to GOP," NP, ND, Wyndham Mortimer Collection, Acc. No. 1171, Box 2, Folder 9: Black Legion Clippings, Walter Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.; Simons, interview; Kraus, interview; Morris, 29-30; Davis, 171.

in Flint before, during, and after the Sit-Down Strike. This fear alone, whether founded or not, would be enough to cause many UAW and Communist supporters to hide their affiliation not only during the strike but for years to come.

There was another very real threat to the Communists among the autoworkers which came to light very quickly after the Sit-Down Strike, and that was prejudice within their own union. A great purge of left-wing elements began in March of 1937. Many who had been on the forefront of the battle against General Motors soon found themselves on the fringes of the UAW as a significant battle began over the leadership of the union, and it was the Communists who were being threatened with expulsion. Much like Communist Phil Raymond had suspected in the 1920s during the organizational drive of the AWU when he likened the AWU and Communists to the fire department, once the emergency was over, the Communists were dismissed because they were no longer needed. Being a Communist in the UAW in the days and years following the Sit-Down strike would get you kicked out of the union regardless of what role you had played in the victory. This kind of ideological cleansing made being a Communist or even left wing a dangerous thing to admit. As one strike participant put it "once you were exposed as a Communist, you were voted out of any office that you held."[201]

The main force behind the expulsion of the Communists from the UAW was the UAW president during the Sit-Down Strike, Homer Martin. Even during the strike he showed that he had reservations about the Communists in the union, particularly Wyndham Mortimer who was first sent to organize Flint in the summer of 1936. By the fall, Martin worked to have Mortimer removed, claiming that he was too left wing, claiming Mortimer was "building a Red empire in Flint."[202] Eventually Mortimer agreed to leave Flint but only if the UAW sent in Robert Travis

[201] King, interview.
[202] Wyndham Mortimer, *Organize!*, 114.

as his replacement. At the time Travis was a very young, inexperienced organizer, and although he was also known to be left-wing, the UAW agreed to send him into Flint, believing that he would be much easier to control that Mortimer, who was already quite powerful in the union.

Once Travis had success in organizing Flint and the strike was underway, Martin and the UAW held their tongues against the Communists involved and worked together towards an ultimate victory. Yet, immediately following the strike in Flint Martin insisted on ridding the union of Communists. Martin was getting his fuel from higher up in the CIO, where there was also a great deal of animosity toward the Communists either from the Socialists or those who were afraid of the entire labor movement being red baited for its Communist affiliation. [203]

Martin first attacked the Communist leaders in Michigan in March of 1937 during the Chrysler strike in Detroit where the workers were fighting for the same deal that the workers in Flint had received. After two weeks of a Sit-Down Strike at Chrysler, Martin made a deal with management to evacuate the factories and begin negotiations as long as Chrysler did not resume operations during that time. The UAW did secure the workers in Detroit the same deal as those in Flint. Many workers, however, still wanted exclusive collective bargaining rights written into the agreement and Martin blamed the Communists for insisting on those rights, stating that they were inciting the workers to rebel against the deal that the UAW had made in order to cause problems within the union.[204]

There were other problems following the UAW immediately after the Sit-Down Strike. Mainly, there were many spontaneous sit-down strikes all over the state of Michigan, known as wild-cat strikes. Martin also blamed these wild-cat strikes on the Communists, insisting that they were trying to take control of the union through such actions that were not sanctioned by the

[203] Keeran, *The Communist Party*, 188.

[204] Keeran, *The Communist Party,* 188.

leaders of the UAW such as himself. The picture painted of the Communists by Martin was quite unfair, and many of the strikers in Flint would later agree. The wild-cat strikes were not led by any one group but were great exhales of power after the struggle between the rank and file workers and management. After such a long power struggle it was only natural that there would be an adjustment period immediately following the UAW's victory. Most wild-cat strikes were a result of the men testing their agreement with GM and their new found power inside the factory.[205]

Tales still survive that the Communist party was in fact trying to take complete control of the UAW in the days that followed the strike, and that their quest for power was what caused the factionalism in the UAW and the eventual split between 1937 and 1939. Yet, in fact, Martin caused the fractionalization by trying to solidify his own power by getting rid of the Communists. In the beginning of the struggle until 1938, the Communist Party did not buck back against Martin's accusations, claiming that they wanted to work towards unity in the UAW and hold the union together, while Martin launched attack after attack. During that time the leaders of the Flint movement saw themselves pushed farther and farther to the outside of the UAW. Henry Kraus was demoted from editor of the union paper to assistant editor and then fired completely in 1937. Mortimer and Victor Reuther were removed from important organizing drives within the auto industry and Robert Travis was demoted and eventually removed from Flint.[206]

There were those who were disturbed by the dismissal of the Flint leaders, especially Travis. Reporter Joe Brown, who made it clear that he himself disliked Communists, stated that "the dismissal of the fighting, militant leaders who led the fight against General Motors showed

[205] Keeran, *The Communist Party,* 189; Travis, interview; Kraus, interview.
[206] Keeran, *The Communist Party,* 190, 191; Travis, interview; Kraus, interview; Anthony, 33.

that Martin and his crowd were ruthless."[207] At the 1937 UAW convention there were clearly two sides forming over this debate. Martin called his side the Progressive Caucus, while the group on the other side, led by Mortimer and Walter Reuther, called themselves the Unity Caucus. The majority of the workers at the convention went with the Unity Caucus. Martin was, however, allowed to stay in power and he even controlled most of the Executive Committee. The Unity Caucus placed Mortimer and Ed Hall as Vice Presidents. Yet, Martin got the board to extend the office and allow five Vice Presidents, to which he appointed three of his own men. Under this new board Martin passed many resolutions which would help him defeat the Communists. He was allowed a budget to pay for spies to provide him with secret intelligence against the Communists, he was also given the power to suspend UAW members without a trial and he abolished the local union papers, which were very often the voice of the Communists and the rank and file workers.[208]

After this solidification of Martin's power within the UAW in 1937, he went after the Communists and specifically Travis. He accused Travis and Mortimer of using strike funds during the Sit-Down Strike to fund the Communist Party instead of the workers. Travis happily opened the financial records from the strike and proved to the UAW that there was no misappropriation of funds, but the accusation, already out there, stuck in many people's minds. In reality there were workers and union members in Flint who were on Martin's side, that were eager to get rid of a lot of the leaders of the Sit-Down Strike; but as many of the strikers claimed, this was not because they believed Martin or hated the Communists, but because they also

[207] Keeran, *The Communist Party,* 191.
[208] Keeran, *The Communist Party,* 191, 192; Anthony, 33.

wanted control on the local level, and red baiting was the most effective way to achieve that goal.[209]

There was a division that existed on the local level in Flint following the strike that played into this fractionalization by Martin and made his quest against the Communists much more successful. It is no secret that those who were involved in the Sit-Down Strike were the more radical of the rank and file men because they were not afraid to seek the change that they desired. However, after the strike there was a great swell of excitement for the UAW among the workers who had seemed so much against the strike while it was underway. These men flooded to the union once victory was achieved, and not only did the ones who had fought so hard against GM have animosity toward the new comers, but also the men who were not involved in the strike were very eager to remove the leaders from power and take control of the union themselves. Martin used the friction already present to oust Travis from his position. Travis knew it! At a dinner held in his honor in Flint before he left town he declared emphatically, "today we have in the high places in the Flint Local, men who were on the sidelines during the big battle last winter."[210]

Martin did begin to overstep his boundaries, however, and the opposition against him grew among the rank and file workers all throughout the UAW. By 1938 Martin was being confronted by the workers and he was buckling, punching one in the face and pulling a gun on another. Next, Martin suspended five members of the Executive Board for Communist activities. Maurice Sugar defended the five suspended board members by showing that Martin had written letters plotting how to get rid of Kraus, Travis, and other leaders in Flint to solidify his own power. The letters were an embarrassment for Martin, but because the five members of the

[209] Keeran, *The Communist Party,* 193; Harris, interview; Kraus, interview; Travis, interview.
[210] Keeran, *The Communist Party,* 193; Kraus, interview; Harris, interview; Travis, interview.

Board who opposed him were suspended and could not vote in their own favor, the Board did convict the five members, which included Mortimer. They were expelled from the union. Since there was so much dissent that followed, John L. Lewis, the leader of the CIO, stepped in and forced Martin to reinstate the five men. The Executive Board then forced Martin from the union. Martin, of course, blamed Lewis and the CIO for getting involved in the UAW's affairs.[211]

Next, Martin tried to take the UAW out of the CIO and back to the AFL, which also angered a lot of UAW men who remembered how poorly they were treated by the AFL in 1934. The combination of Martin's tyrannical actions, the men's hatred for the AFL, and the dismissal of top organizers who were affiliated with the Communist Party brought the majority of the UAW men to back the Unity Caucus and the CIO.[212] It also helped that the Unity Caucus contained the leaders of the Sit-Down strike, along with dynamic new leaders like Walter Reuther. At the 1939 UAW convention many felt that Mortimer had a good chance to win the presidency. There were calls, however, for someone who would be more neutral, not as openly Communist as Mortimer. These calls mainly came from Walter Reuther and the Socialists within the Unity Caucus. In an effort to hold the union together, the Communists and Mortimer agreed and R.J. Thomas was elected president of the UAW. It seemed that the problems for the Communists were not over simply because Martin and his faction were out of the UAW. They now faced open opposition from the Socialists and men like Walter Reuther. Immediately after Thomas took the presidency the Executive Board was cleansed of all Communist influence. Reuther went on a crusade to rid the UAW of the Communists who had not only won the strike in Flint but had also helped him get rid of Martin. Travis claimed that Reuther got him fired from his tool and die job the day before he got seniority, which prompted Travis to leave the

[211] Keeran, *The Communist Party,* 193, 196-198.
[212] Keeran, *The Communist Party,* 193, 194; Bully, interview; Kraus, interview; Travis, interview.

UAW and the auto industry completely. Reuther began red-baiting the Communists and rose to power by waging his crusade against the left because "Stalin is trying to take over control of the union."[213]

Walter Reuther would go on not only to purge Communists from the UAW, but he also left the Socialist Party around 1939, all in attempts to move up in the UAW, and at that he was quite successful. The problems that the Communists had in the union went deeper than just prejudice and hatred for their beliefs but was rooted in fear. Men like Martin and Reuther identified the importance of the Communist members in the UAW and also the support that they had gained from the rank and file workers after the Sit-Down Strike. Both men knew that in order to win control of the UAW they would have to get rid of the Communists, and the only way to do that was to paint them in a negative light under the shadow of the growing power of the Soviet Union and Joseph Stalin and because of the naitivity of the American people. No matter what the motives were behind the expulsion, it was a very real and tragic event that occurred in the UAW's history, and it was something that surely caused fear among the Communists who now had to fight the union itself to keep their jobs and the rights they had fought so hard to earn during the Sit-Down Strike. There were many strikers who were interviewed who declined to speak about Communists who were extremely hesitant to even name someone that they might have suspected of being a Communist, all because they recognized that there would and could be backlash against that person from their own union. As Norman Bully admitted in 1980, forty-three years after the strike, "I hate to identify guys as Communists now, because I wouldn't want to hurt them or their families."[214]

[213]Travis, interview; Kraus, interview; Keeran, *The Communist Party,* 198-200.
[214] Bully, interview.

Whether men were afraid of the boogie man or their own local UAW leader, there was a real and tangible fear among the rank and file men involved in the Flint Sit-Down Strike who associated themselves with the Communist Party. That fear alone has changed the collective memory of the strike and the political affiliation of many of those who were involved. That must be taken into account when considering the extent of influence the Communist Party had among the workers in Flint during the 1930s and beyond.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The workers involved in the Flint Sit-Down strike left behind a legacy that lives on in Flint, the UAW, and throughout the history of labor organization. Their own story, however, has never been told. Who they were, how they truly felt inside the factories for forty-four days, who they trusted, or who they were afraid of—all have been left out of the story of the strike. By investigating the strikers' collected memories, along with primary source material from the actual strike, it is possible partially to answer such questions. It is also possible to address the issue of the strikers' political affiliation in a way that has been ignored because of the politically charged attitudes toward leftists and specifically Communists in America.

So many see the association of the Sit-Down strikers with the Communist Party as a negative affiliation, one that must be used as slanderous against the memory of the strike and the rank and file workers. This study, however, was an attempt to reconcile that truth and that tradition, putting the Communist and left wing elements of the UAW into the context of the day. By recognizing that the Communists in America were the only ones who were listening to the disaffected autoworkers and supporting them in their struggles toward industrial unionization, one can begin to understand the true political leanings of the autoworkers. Instead of viewing their Communist ties as something to be ashamed of, one can identify with their motives and have a better understanding of the difficulties that the strikers faced.

Over the years it has become very easy for historians to ignore or deny the Communist leanings of the rank and file autoworker during the Sit-Down strike because so many of the men later denied any such affiliation or refused to discuss it. By looking not only at the hostile atmosphere towards the Communists before and during the strike, but also how that intensified in

America as it entered the Cold War, one can see that the strikers had very good reason to avoid any association with the Communists. The picture of Communism that entered the American consciousness after the Bolshevik Revolution was certainly different from the Communists who were operating in the industrial trade unionization drive, specifically among the autoworkers. In truth, the Communists in America who worked in the Sit-Down strike were fighting for the same things that the workers all believed in—a living wage, seniority benefits, better working conditions, and union democracy. The autoworkers followed the Communists not because they were fighting to overthrow the American government but because they wanted to improve their lives, and the Communists were providing them with the organization and leadership to do just that.

The fact that the American people could not reconcile their prejudice and fear against men like Lenin and Stalin and what was happening within the USSR certainly tainted their view of the American Communists working within the trade unionization effort and the autoworkers. This prejudice only intensified as America emerged from World War II and eventually entered the Cold War. The immediate hatred toward the Communists in the unionization drive manifested itself in the creation of violent groups, such as the Black Legion, that targeted the left wing elements of the union. After the strike, this hatred continued and became even more obvious as it manifested itself in the UAW through the Communist purges. This prejudice and hatred was still alive and well when most of the strikers were interviewed for the Labor History Project (the 1970s and 1980s) while America was still in the thick of the Cold War. Those interviewed still had reservations about disclosing their political affiliation because they understood the threat that had existed against them.

The Flint Sit-Down strike was a success because of the autoworkers' affiliation with the Communist Party. The strike leaders themselves, Wyndham Mortimer and Robert Travis, were part of the Communist movement in America at the time, and they brought with them the organizational experience and the ability to gain the trust of the autoworkers in Flint. Many of those who helped to fund the strike and support the strikers during those forty-four days were also part of the Communist movement, including the cook who came up from Detroit, Max Gazan, along with Henry and Dorothy Kraus who ran the strike paper and organized the women to provide food for the men. The Communist involvement went all the way up to the UAW lawyers, Maurice Sugar and Lee Pressman, in Detroit, who worked to get the first injunction thrown out, while also participating in all of the negotiations with GM. The men inside the factories also received all of their guidance from the Communist leadership, which allowed them to maintain peace and order inside those factories for the duration of the strike.

Without the presence of the left wing elements in Flint, the strike movement may not have even happened. Without the leadership and organizational abilities of men like Mortimer and Travis, the autoworkers in Flint would not have been able to seize on such an opportunity. When Mortimer first came to Flint in the summer of 1936 he found a floundering union with few men on the rolls. He also discovered that the men on the board of the union there were mostly GM spies and untrustworthy. At first when he approached men about joining the union he found that no one trusted the union and he had to convince them that he was not part of the AFL and that the goals of the UAW were quite different. His drive and leadership, along with the ideologies that he was sharing with the autoworkers, brought the men into the union that summer. Without this unionization drive the Sit-Down strike would not have been possible.

It is because of the importance of the relationship between the rank and file autoworkers in Flint and the Communist Party that this study is so important. It was a vital part of the Sit-Down strike and the autoworkers' personal stories cannot be ignored. It does not darken the strikers' heroic image but illuminates it because it makes it possible to understand the world that they were living and fighting in when they sat down inside the factories.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

"2,000 Guardsmen." *New York Times,*13 January 1937.

Amann, Peter H. "Vigilante Fascism: The Black Legion as an American Hybrid." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25, no. 3 (July 1983): 490-524. Accessed via JSTOR 7-11-11.

Anthony, Al. *The History of UAW Local 659: We Make our Own History.* Flint, Mi: Suburban Printing, 1993.

"Auto Strike Parley Off; Strikers Stay in Plants, so G.M.C. Bars Talk." *New York Times,* 18 January 1937, 1:8.

Babson, Steve. *The Unfinished Struggle: Turning Points in American Labor, 1877-Present.* New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999.

Barbash, Jack Collection, Series III. Accession No. LP001237, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Barnard, John. *American Vanguard: The United Auto Workers During the Reuther Years, 1935 1970.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004.

"The Black Legion." *New York Times,*31 May 1936, IV:1.

"The Black Legion and its Murderers," *The Nation,* 3 June 1936.

Bliven, Bruce. "Sitting Down in Flint." *The New Republic* 89 (January 27, 1937): 377-379.

"Briggs Heads Rebuff a Strike Committee." *New York Times,* 7 February 1933, 21:7.

Boyer, Richard O. and Herbert Morais. *Labor's Untold Story.* New York: United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, 1955.

Clinansmith, Michael S. "The Black Legion: Hooded Americanism in Michigan." *Michigan History* LV, no. 3 (Fall, 1971): 243-262.

"The Communists and the CIO," *New Republic, 23* February 1938.

Cook, Alexander Collection. Accession No. LP001511, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University. Detroit, MI.

Cronin, William. "Sit-Down: What's Happened in the Automobile Industry Since the Enactment of the National Labor Relations Act…As Told to Congress." Presented June 27, 1939 before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor.

Davis, Forrest. "Labor Spies and the Black Legion." *The New Republic* (June 17, 1936).

Denny, Harold N. "Briggs Delivers Bodies for Fords." *New York Times,2* February 1933, 6:1.

------. "Briggs Plant Gets Ford Ultimatum." *New York Times,* 31 January 1933, 9:2.

------. "Crisis Comes Today in Ford Shut-Down." *New York Times*, 30 January 1933, 3:5.

------. "Ford is Considering Making Car Bodies." *New York Times,* 29 January 1933, 1:2.

Dolgoff, Sam Papers. Accession No. LP000568, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University. Detroit, MI.

Dollinger, Sol and Genora Johnson. *Not Automatic: Women and the Left in the Forging of the Auto Workers' Union.* New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000.

Dvorak, Kenneth R. "Terror in Detroit: The Rise and Fall of Michigan's Black Legion." PhD diss., Bowling Green State University, 2000.

Fine, Sidney. *Sit-Down: The General Motors Strike of 1936-1937.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969.

------. "The General Motors Sit-Down Strike: A Re-examination." *The American Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (April, 1965): 691-713. Accessed via JSTOR 10-20-10.

"Fisher Body Strikers Clash with Troopers." *New York Times,* 4 July 1930, 2:5.

"The Flint Alliance: Was it a GM Front or a Grass-Roots Opposition to Sit-Down." *The Flint Journal,* 4 January 1987.

"Flint Group Asks President to Act." *New York Times,* 12 January 1937, 12:5.

Flint Labor Records. Accession No. LR000517, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University. Detroit, MI.

"Flint Strikers Shun Reds." *New York Times,* 6 July 1930, 17:2.

Foster, William Z. *American Trade Unionism and Organization Strategy and Tactics.* New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1947.

------. *History of the Communist Party of the United States.* New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1968.

Ganley, Nat Papers. Accession No. LP00320, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University. Detroit, MI.

The Government Military Investigations—Auto Industry Records. Accession No. LR001143, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Gustin, Lawrence, R. *Picture History of Flint.* Flint: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 1976.

Haessler, Carl. "Behind the Auto Strike." *New Masses* (February 2, 1937): 3-5.

Howe, Irving and B.J. Widick. *The UAW and Walter Reuther*. New York: Random House, 1949.

"Hudson Auto Plant Closed by a Strike." *New York Times,* 8 February 1933, 5:1.

"Hudson Car Plants Resume Production." *New York Times,* 10 February 1933, 5:2.

"Hudson Plant Bids Strikers Return." *New York Times,* 9 February 1933, 14:2.

Johnston, "Parson Jack." *Labor Dangers of the C.I.O. Movement.* Columbia, GA: Self Published, 1937.

Keeran, Roger. *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers' Unions.* New York: International Publishers, 1980.

Keeran, Roger. "Communist Influence in the Automobile Industry, 1920-1933: Paving the Way for an Industrial Union," *Labor History,* 20, no. 2 (1979): 189-225.

Klehr, Harvey. *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade.* New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1984.

Kraus, Henry Papers. Accession No. LP000112, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University. Detroit, MI.

Laslett, John H.M. "Review: Giving Superman a Human Face: American Communism and the Automobile Workers in the 1930s." *Reviews in American History* 9, no. 1 (March, 1981): 112-117. Accessed via JSTOR 10-16-10.

Lens, Sidney. *Left, Right, and Center: Conflicting Forces in American Labor.* H. Regency Company, 1949.

Levinson, Edward Papers. Accession No. LP000085, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University. Detroit, MI.

Levinson, Edward. *Labor on the March.* New York: University Books, 1956 (1938).

Lindahl, James Papers. Accession No. LP001061, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University. Detroit, MI.

Lissner, Will. "Black Legion Held Wide Lawbreaker." *New York Times,* 30 May 1936, 1:6.

------. "Black Legion's Spread Surprising to Midwest." *New York Times,* 31 May 1936, IV:6.

------. "Black Legion Thug Confesses Murder." *New York Times,* 4 June 1936, 1:4.

Lovett, Robert Morss. "A G.M. Stockholder Visits Flint." *The Nation* 144 (January 30, 1937): 123-124.

Lovin, Hugh, T. "The Automobile Workers Unions and the Fight for Labor Parties in the 1930s." *Indiana Magazine of History* 77, no. 2 (1981): 123-149.

Magil, A.B. "The Flint Auto Strike." Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University. Detroit, MI.

Morris, George. *The Black Legion Rides.* New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1936.

Mortimer, Wyndham. *"Organize! My Life as a Union Man.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.

Mortimer, Wyndham, Papers. Accession No. LP001171, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Murphy, Frank Collection. University of Michigan—Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor, MI.

Nethercott, Shaun S. and Neil O. Leighton. "Memory, Process, and Performance." *The Oral History Review,* 18, no. 2 (Autumn, 1990): 37-60. Accessed via JSTOR 10-12-11.

"Number of Sit-Down Strikes in 1937." *Monthly Labor Review* 47 (August, 1938): 360-362.

O'Boyle, Lenore. "The German Independent Socialists During the First World War." *The American Historical Review* 56, no. 4 (July, 1951): 824-831. Accessed via JSTOR 3-7 11.

"Pay Rise Brings Ford Shut-Down Near End; Auto Maker is Quoted as Blaming Bankers." *New York Times,* 28 January 1933, 1:4.

Peterson, Joyce Shaw. *American Automobile Workers, 1900-1933.* New York: State University of New York Press, 1987.

"Plant Visit Admitted." *The Detroit News,* 2 June 1936.

Rappard, W.F. "Karl Marx and Labor Legislation." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 27, no. 3 (May, 1913): 530-535. Accessed via JSTOR 3-7-11.

Rosenberg, Leonard B. "The 'Failure' of the Socialist Party of America." *The Review of Politics* 31, no. 3 (July, 1969): 329-352. Accessed via JSTOR 9-22-11.

Rossiter, Clinton. *Marxism: The View from America.* New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960.

Seidler, Murray. "The Socialist Party and American Unionism." *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 5, no.3 (August, 1961): 207-236. Accessed via JSTOR 9-22-11.

Simons, Bud and Hazel Papers. Accession No. LP000160, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Silverberg, Louis G. "'Citizens' Committees: Their Role in Industrial Conflict." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (March, 1941): 17-37.

"The Sit-Down," *The New Republic* 89 (January 20, 1937): 342-344.

"'Sit-Downs' Close Four Big Plants of General Motors." *New York Times,* 31 December 1936, 1:8.

Sugar, Maurice Papers. Accession No. LP000232, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

Time Magazine. "Labor: Automobile Armageddon." January 18, 1937. Accessed online www.time.com

Time Magazine. "Labor: Strikes-of the Week." December 21, 1936. Accessed online www.time.com

Time Magazine. "National Affairs: Alarums & Excursions." January 25, 1937. Accessed online www.time.com

Time Magazine. "National Affairs: On the March." February 1, 1937. Accessed online www.time.com

Time Magazine. "National Affairs: U.S. Terror." February 8, 1937. Accessed online www.time.com

University of Michigan-Flint Labor History Project. Genesee Historical Collections Center, University of Michigan, Flint. Flint, MI.

Ward, Paul. "Who is Behind the Black Legion?" *The Nation*, June 10, 1936.

The Wayne County AFL-CIO Collection Series I, Part I. Accession No. LR000236, Walter Reuther Labor Archives, Detroit, MI.

"We Sat Down With the Strikers and General Motors." *Mill and Factory* 20 (February, 1937): 33-60.

Wolfe, Bertram D. "Lenin has Trouble with Engels." *Russian Review* 15, no. 3 (July, 1956): 196-209. Accessed via JSTOR 3-7-11.

"Workers Stoned in Street Cars." *New York Times*, 5 February 1933, 22:2.

VITA

BRANDI N. MCCLOUD

Personal Data:	Date of Birth: June 19, 1978 Place of Birth: Flint, Michigan Marital Status: Married
Education:	Public Schools, Byron, Michigan B.A. Honors in History, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 2010 M.A. History, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 2012
Professional Experience:	Teacher, Science Hill High School; Johnson City, Tennessee, 2010 Instructor of Record, East Tennessee State University, 2011-2012 Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University, History Department, 2010-2012
Publications and Papers:	Tennessee Regional Phi Alpha Theta Conference. "American Way of Life as a Civil Religion." 2010 "Comic Code: Censorship in the Atomic Age." 2011 Carolina Regional Phi Alpha Theta Conference. "American Way of Life as a Civil Religion." 2010 "Frank Murphy: Political Ideals and the Sit-Down Strike." 2011 "The Black Legion." 2012 SSSA National Conference "Frank Murphy: Political Ideals and the Sit-Down Strike." 2011
Honors and Awards:	James H. Quillen Scholarship 2011-2012 Barbara Jaffe Silvers Award 2011-2012 Thesis Research Award 2011 Teaching Excellence Award Nominee 2012