LABOR RELATIONS IN THE AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY DURING THE NINETEEN TWENTIES

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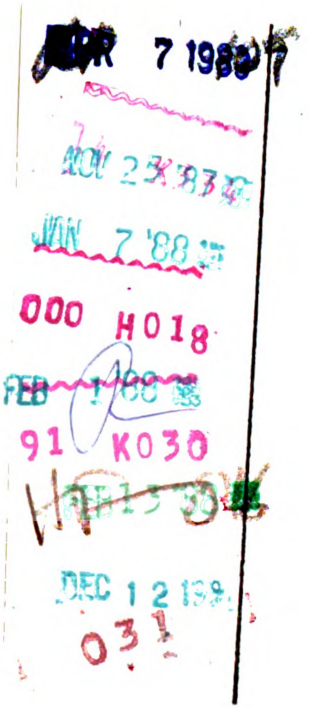

LABOR RELATIONS IN THE AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY DURING THE NINETEEN TWENTIES.

BY

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A THESIS

Submitted to the School of Science and Arts of Michigan State University of Agriculture and Applied Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master Of The Arts

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1958.

To

My Mother

who typed the manuscript

And

Dr. Madison Kuhn

My Major Professor.

Introduction

Labor unionism in this country is as old as the nation. There were strikes and short lived unions in the last years of the eighteenth century. The first city locals were started in the eighteen twenties and in the eighteen thirties the first nation wide federation, the National Labor union was founded. By the eighteen fifties this organization had locals in many northern cities. In 1869, the Knights Of Labor, the first industrial type union was founded. In 1886 Sammuel Gompers founded the American Federation Of Labor which soon replaced the Knights of Labor as the central labor organization. Since that time organized labor has had its periods of "ups" and "downs". One of the "down" periods was the decade of the nineteen twenties.

In 1920 union memberships amounted to 5,000,000, the total by 1930 was 3,000,000.

It is the labor union activities of the automobile workers in this decade, with which this paper is concerned.

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CHAPTER I

THE AUTOMOBILE WORKER

In 1928 the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce listed thirty-two companies which manufactured passenger cars and trucks. These thirty-two companies manufactured forty-four makes of autos, and about 765 models.[1] These autos were manufactured in 262 plants, forty-four of which were in Michigan, thirty-four in Ohio, twenty-five in Illinois, twenty-two in California, twenty in New York, nineteen in Indiana, fourteen each in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, eight each in Missouri and New Jersey, six in Massachusetts and smaller number in twenty-two other states. The 262 plants included not only the large ones like Ford, but many assembly plants and small separate companies all over the country, most of them employing a thousand workers or less. Actually, in the nineteen twenties seventy-five per cent of the cars were produced in Michigan. In August 1928, the Detroit area produced 11,000 cars a day, the Flint area about 5,900, and Pontiac and Lansing between six and seven hundred each. Of the seventeen companies that made an average of more than 3,000 cars a day twelve were in Michigan.[2]

[1] United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin 438, Wages and Hours of Labor In The Motor Vehicle Industry, 1925, (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.) p. 12.

[2] Automotive Industries, Dec. 22, 1928, p. 898.

In the early days of the auto industry when the shops were small and the production low, skilled workers predominated the industry. By the nineteen twenties, however, the skilled worker had almost completely been displaced by the "machine operator" with a job that could be learned in a few minutes or hours. Workers classed as "unskilled" were in the vast majority by the nineteen twenties. A report by R. R. Lutz made in 1916 showed that even then fifty-four per cent of the jobs in an auto plant required no skill or previous experience.[3] Henry Ford, in his book, My Life And Work, stated that in his plant forty-three per cent of the jobs required not over one days training, thirty-six per cent from one day to one week, six per cent from one to two weeks, fourteen per cent from one month to one year, and one per cent between one and six years.[4] In other words eighty-five per cent of the employees could learn their trade within one month.

In addition to being "unskilled" the auto worker during the twenties was very apt to be a transient worker. Many men in the auto plant came from the farm or the small town.

[3] Robert W. Dunn, Labor And Automobiles, (New York 1929) p. 60.

[4] Henry Ford, My Life And Work, (New York, 1923) p. 110.

In the auto plant he would learn to run a punch press, or assemble the parts of a motor, but he learned no definite skill or trade as he moved constantly from firm to firm. Most of these laborers regarded their work in the auto plants as temporary, and many had amitions of opening a filling station or repair garage of their own. The majority of these early auto workers lived in a Detroit rooming or boarding house, saving little of their weekly pay.[5]

During periods of prosperity and expansion great numbers flocked to the auto plants, When the depression followed, they returned to the farms and villages. As the nineteen twenties wore on, however, they became less mobile and more static.[6]

Before World War I most of the workers in the auto plants came from the farms and villages of Michigan, Indiana, Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota, and South Dakota. During the nineteen twenties forty-seven out of every one hundred workers were born outside of Michigan, and less than one per cent of the residents of the city of Detroit were born in that city.[7] At the very beginning of the industry came fairly skilled craftsmen from the old steamboat engine business of the Great

[5]Dunn, Labor And Automobiles, pp. 62-63

[6]Herbert Harris, "Revolt Of The Robots", Current History, April 1938, p. 48.

[7]Ibid., p. 48.

Lakes and the carriage factories of the middle west. They were joined by ex-lumber jacks, copper miners, and farm laborers. With the coming of World War I and defense work in the auto plants, agents from Detroit circulated through the south with tales of fabulous wages and wonderful conditions. As a result thousands of transient workers mainly from Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, Alabama, and Mississippi flocked to Detroit. This practice continued after the war and throughout the nineteen twenties. Some of the workers, especially if assured of three months or more work, brought their families. Most regarded unionism as "Red" and "Bolshevick." By the late nineteen twenties however, the auto workers were a fairly settled group.

The 1920 census revealed that out of some 121,000 semi-skilled operators in the auto plants, some 34,000 were foreign born, and out of 83,000 laborers, 39,000 were foreign born. This proportion was reduced somewhat by the immigration laws of the twenties. The most prominent of the nationalities represented were Canadian and English. In addition to the Canadians, English, Irish and Scotch; Poles, Germans, Russians, Italians, Hungarians, and Belgiums, were among the dominant groups in Detroit.[8] The Polish were the largest single group other than the British and the village of Hamtramck was almost

[8]United States Census, 1920 Vol. IX, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., p. 688.

exclusively composed of those of this extraction. In addition Mexicans began to be employed in considerable numbers during the late twenties. In the outstate auto plants in Lansing, Flint and Saginaw, the number of foreign born was much lower.

Before the decade of the nineteen thirties a considerable number of Negroes were employed by the Detroit automobile companies. They were lured north by circulars distributed by bus companies, employment agencies, and the auto companies themselves, telling of the high wages and good conditions. A great many came during World War I, and later in the nineteen twenties. In 1926, there were 25,000 to 30,000 Negro wage earners in Detroit. About 16,400 were employed in the foundries and the rest largely in the automobile plants. In most instances the Negroes were employed chiefly in unskilled, heavy, manual work. Many were employed in work that no one else would do. In the Chevrolet plant they were employed in the most rough, and disagreeable work available, such as painting axles, and working emery grinding wheels. In the Hudson plant, Negroes were employed as floor sweepers, or ice men. They were given a starting wage of thirty-five to thirty-eight cents an hour and seldom if ever promoted, regardless of ability.[9] This kind of treatment was not practiced in the auto plants alone during the twenties, but in industry as a whole.

[9]Dunn, Labor And Automobiles, p. 69.

In 1920 it was estimated that from nine to twelve per cent of the employees in the auto plants were under twenty-one years of age. A large number of minors were working at both skilled and unskilled occupations. They were largely over-employed as machine operators, stock and tool crib workers, laborers and helpers in the foundry, truckers, drivers, and inspectors. Some were learning the more skilled crafts, acting as toolmakers helpers, moulders helpers, drill press operators, and welders. The younger workers were usually paid less than the older ones.[10]

In addition to the young men, women were also hired in the auto plants during the twenties, in ever increasing numbers. In 1920 over 15,000 women were hired as laborers or semi-skilled operators in the plants. They were employed in almost all departments: assembly work, polishing, sanding, buffing, operating cranes, running punch presses, welding work, minding lathes and grinders, almost all work except the very heaviest.

As far as labor unions were concerned, Detroit auto makers were not only non-union, but like many other industries anti-union. The number of union workers in the auto plants numbered only a few hundred, principally skilled craftsmen.[11]

[10]United States Children's Bureau, Minors In Automobile And Metal Manufacturing Industries in Michigan, (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. 1923, Bulletin 196) pp. 57-58.

[11]Raymond J. Walsh, C. I. O., Industrial Unionism in Action, (New York, 1937) p. 96.

CHAPTER II

WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE AUTO PLANTS DURING THE NINETEEN TWENTIES

In this chapter the conditions of work in the auto plants, with the exception of those in the Ford Plant, will be divided into three parts, namely: hours of work, wages, health and safety.

With the exception of the Ford Plant, the average work week in the auto plants was fifty hours. In 1925 the Bureau of Labor Statistics made a survey of the industry, finding that out of 144,000 workers the average weekly hours of work were from 50.1 to 50.3. According to this study forty-eight per cent of the workers covered were on a fifty hour week. Slightly over twenty-seven per cent worked between forty-eight and fifty hours a week, eighteen per cent worked between fifty and fifty-five hours, and four per cent over fifty-five hours.[1] The length of the work day usually ran from eight to nine hours.[2] With regard to Dunn's charge that the auto workers worked a longer day than those in other industries it is interesting to note that during the twenties the steel workers, worked twelve hours a day, seven days a week. The average number of hours worked then, is eighty-four a week, which is far above the fifty hour average worked by the employees in the auto plants. Also when the shifts

[1]United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin 438, pp. 8-10.

[2]Ibid., p. 12.

changed once a fortnight, one shift had to work a twenty-four stretch. All establishments, with the exception of Hudson, operated on a six-day week basis. The length of the day shift was nine hours, with the night shift running about eleven hours. Dunn charges that the auto workers were worse off than the other industries including steel.[3] In 1925, thirteen per cent of the auto workers, worked eight hours per day, for six days. One per cent worked an eight and one half hour day plus five and one half hours on Saturday. Forty-eight per cent worked nine hours per day for five days and a five hour Saturday.[4] The length of the work day for the different jobs in the plant ranged from the high of the machinist, seventy-two per cent of whom worked six days, and the laborers sixty-seven per cent of whom worked six days, to a low of the top builders, forty-one per cent of whom worked six days. In the organized industries ninety-one per cent were working forty-eight hours or less. None of the auto workers worked forty-eight hours, unless they were on short time, and this meant a corresponding reduction in earnings.

Concerning overtime, there was a great deal of it during some periods of the year. During the spring particularly the

[3] Dunn, Labor And Automobiles, p. 93.

[4] United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin 438, p. 11.

amount of overtime could go as high as three or four hours per day. The shifts, many times, worked twelve hours. Also during these periods, the workers were at their benches on Sundays and holidays. An increased rate of pay was paid for overtime in sixty of the ninety-nine plants covered in the Bureau of Labor Statistics survey in 1925. These increased rates ranged from time and one fifth to time and one half.[5] Buick, Nash, Dodge, and Chrysler employees got the straight rate for overtime, including Sundays and holidays.

The average full time per hour earnings of all males in all auto occupations combined increased from 66.2 cents in 1922 to 72.9 cents in 1925. Those of females increased from 43.8 cents to 46.7 cents. Combined the earnings increased from 65.7 cents to 72.3 cents.[6] These wages per hour were higher than those for manufacturing as a whole. Throughout the nineteen twenties the average hourly wage for workers engaged in manufacturing remained steady at about fifty-six cents.[7] In its 1925 survey the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that in 1922 the average hourly earnings ranged from 49.5 cents for laborers to 93.1 cents for stripers. In 1925 laborers received fifty-seven

[5]United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin 438, p. 23.

[6]Ibid., p. 1

[7]Arthur S. Link, American Epoch, History of the United States Since the 1890's,(New York 1955) p. 303.

cents an hour, while the "ding men" who were the most highly paid workers in the plant, were paid $1.37 cents an hour. "Stripers" painted the narrow gold band around the auto body, while the "ding men" "dinged out" the small dents in the fenders and bumpers which showed up after painting or varnishing.

In terms of weekly earnings the average male workers were earning $33.19 in 1922 and $36.87 in 1925. These figures are for steady work.[8]

Concerning real wages or actual purchasing power or the take home pay, the A. F. L. in a survey conducted in 1928 concluded that real wages were only eight and six tenths per cent higher in 1927, than in 1899, 1899 being the base year - 100. The trend of real wages was as follows:[9]

1899	100	1921	89.6
1904	90.3	1923	111.0
1909	82.8	1924	112.1
1914	90.4	1925	108.6
1919	89.2		

The automobile industry was among those to have the smallest wage increase in the period from 1899 to 1927. In comparison with union wages, the wages of the auto workers were lower. The Bureau of Labor Statistics found the average hourly rate for male workers in the auto plants to be sixty-six cents

[8]United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin 438, p. 1.

[9]Paul H. Douglas, Real Wages In The United States, (New York, 1930) pp. 306-10.

in the year 1922-23, and about seventy-two cents in 1925.[10] The union average wage in 1923 was eighty-six cents per hour, and ninety-eight cents an hour in 1925 for all industry. The union wages showed an increase of twenty-seven per cent between 1922 and 1925, while the auto wage increased only ten per cent in the same period.[11] Among the plants that payed lower than the average was Briggs with an average wage of fifty-five cents an hour.[12] Also labor's share in the value of profit decreased. In 1925 only forty per cent of the value of the auto's price went to labor, while in 1923 the per cent was about forty-five, which was about the same as 1904.

With respect to incentive payment, the auto industry led all the rest. In its 1925 survey the Department of Labor found that thirty-eight out of the ninety-nine plants surveyed had either group or individual bonus plans.[13] The gang bonus was very common to all departments in the auto plants. Flint Chevrolet had 13,000 out of its 14,000 workers on a bonus plan. Under the bonus system a specific product was made or assembled by men divided into gangs of fifty or more. A variable bonus

[10] United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin 438, p. 1.

[11] Douglas, Real Wages In The United States, p. 96.

[12] Auto Workers News, Feb. 1928 and May 1927,

[13] United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin 438, p. 20.

payment was paid to the group, based upon the production above a certain set standard which it achieved, which was divided among the members of the group. A flat rate was paid to all members, the lump sum was the bonus, and the amount depended upon production above and beyond the set standard.

The accident rate was lower in the auto industry than for industry as a whole. For the years 1925 and 1926, the average accident rate per 10,000 workers was 315.2. One out of every thirty workers was injured. The death rate was 2.7 per ten thousand workers, the permanent disability rate was 40.9, and the temporary disability rate was 71.6. The assembly line was a great source of accidents in the twenties. Also the noise in the plant blunted the worker's senses, thus rendering him unconscious of danger. The most common accidents consisted of getting caught in belts or chain belts, being caught between car chassis on the assembly line, dropping material on the feet, being run over by small shop trucks and getting the hands caught in machines. The punch presses were extremely dangerous, as were lathes and grinders. Most of the plants had safety rules, but in many cases they were not strictly enforced.

On April 23, 1927, at least twenty-one workers were burned to death, and many others permanently injured when a fire and an explosion destroyed a large part of the Harper Avenue plant of the Briggs Company in Detroit. Highly inflammable materials such as nitro-cellulose, acetone, benzol, and wood

alcohol were stored in the plant. These materials were used in mixing the lacquer that was sprayed on the auto bodies. The mixture was sprayed at a very high pressure, producing a situation very condusive to explosion. In addition the Auto Workers News charged that the company failed to provide an adequate system of blowers to carry the fumes away.[14] Following the explosion was a fire which almost completely destroyed the building. The reason for the explosion was the fact that the metal nozzles on the paint sprayers were not grounded. Also many of the workers were burned to death or injured because of the fact that their clothes were saturated with the inflammable paint mixture. The painting was done on the third floor of a five story building, thus making for greater danger to the other workers. Today most painting is done in a one-story building devoted solely to that purpose. The Briggs fire caused damages estimated at three million dollars.[15]

In the auto plants, about the greatest danger to health was the paint department. According to Kober and Hayhurst, about five per cent to ten per cent of the workers contracted tuberculosis or lead poisoning.[16] In the paint department the paint, which was sprayed at a tremendous velocity, created a cloud of

[14]Auto Workers News, July 1929.

[15]The New York Times, April 24, 1927.

[16]Kober and Hayhurst, Industrial Health, (Philadelphia, Pa. 1924) pp. 193-94.

fog in which the men had to work. Respirators were not used because they were too uncomfortable and bulky. According to the Michigan Safety Law, blowers were required, but in many of the auto plants they were generally inadequate or non-existent.

In addition to the actual painting, wet sanding was also a hazard to the worker's health. The sanders worked the day through in a cloud of sand and metal dust.

Another health hazard was the electroplating process used in making chromium bumpers and other auto accessories. Many workers received chrome poisoning and skin irrations from the operation.

The lack of adequate washrooms and a short lunch period were also a health hazard in the auto plants. Many of the auto plants provided no washrooms whatever for the workers, just an occasional toilet stool. There was no place to hang the street clothes, and no place to wash when the shift was over. The Michigan Safety Law provided that all manufacturers should provide adequate washrooms for the employees.[17] This was flouted in the Michigan auto plants.[18] The fifteen or ten minute lunch period was a great health hazard. The lunch had

[17] Labor Laws of Michigan, p. 13.

[18] Keith Sward, The Legend of Henry Ford, (New York 1948) p. 78.

to be eaten at the bench, and not in a special place. The grease and grime of the factory was bound to get into the worker's lunch bucket. Over all conditions in the auto plant during the twenties, however, were fairly good when compared with industry as a whole, and especially such industries as textiles, mining, or steel.

Throughout the nineteen twenties unemployment was chronic in the auto industry. This was due to season fluctuation, technological advances, speedups and demand. Needless to say, employment was very irregular. A slow-up in orders for cars, the season, a new machine, could all result in a large number of workers being temporarily unemployed. The layoffs might be from a few hours to several months in duration. The seasonal unemployment was the greatest in the fall and least in the spring and early summer.[19] The demand had a great deal to do with employment. If the "style" of a new model was not fancied by the buyers, the plant was likely to be "down" for the season. In the years from 1923-1925, unemployment increased in Detroit's auto plants. The years 1925-27, saw a further increase but, the unemployment figure lessened from 1927 to the depression.

Although in the auto industry, the wages were sometimes low, the hours long, and pace fast, these were not the principal

[19] United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bulletin 438, p. 17.

grievances of the workers. The greatest amount of unrest was caused by the uncertainty of tenure, and the almost total lack of seniority privileges.[20]

Employment methods in the twenties were crude to say the least. The man merely waited in line until he came to the hiring agent, who conducted a short interview. If no jobs were open, a sign was posted to that effect, and the job hunter slowly made the rounds of the plants looking for work. If the plant was hiring, the men as they stood in line were constantly "supervised" by the police.

Toward the end of the decade, however, there were some employment offices set up. The Employers Association of Detroit for one established an employment office in 1928. The person looking for work would go to one of these offices and register his name and skill for a fee of $5.00. When a job became available he was notified.[21]

[20] S. M. Levin, "Ford Profit Sharing", Personnel Journal, August 1927, p. 534.

[21] Dunn, Labor and Automobiles, p. 116.

CHAPTER III

WORKING CONDITIONS AT FORD

According to Henry Ford, businessmen must operate in a social sense, not just for profit. Prices should not be what the traffic will bear, but as low as possible. The classical system of charging and paying according to supply and demand is false and doomed. A business is a service and not a profit pump, said Ford. The business must be the businessman's work, pleasure, profession and religion. He must bear alike the gains and the losses. A business system that causes depression in a nation cannot be called a success. The degree of success or failure of business is the degree to which it provided a useful necessary service to all the people. Prosperity takes the brains out of business. Businessmen turn from the altar of service to the altar of mamon.

Ford was against hard work, but he also said a man must work hard. In his book, Today and Tomorrow, he stated, "We will not put on the back of a man what we can put on the back of a machine."[1] When a man performed hard work, he was not very productive, but when he worked hard he was very productive. In addition the worker must be willing and able to work.

[1]Henry Ford, Today and Tomorrow, (New York, 1926) p. 150.

In Ford's scheme of things, purchasing power depended upon wages. If men were unemployed, purchasing power and the level of the economy goes down. Business depression is brought about. Purchasing power drops when wages drop. The cure, then, for business depression, is to boost purchasing power, and this is done by raising wages. This was the main reason for the $5.00 day in 1914. Wages are more of a question for management than for labor/ for low wages will ruin business much more quickly than they will ruin labor. The old theory that the wages depend upon the bargaining power of labor is false. This just breeds trouble in the form of labor strife and violence. A business should have its rate of wages, and dividends somewhere in agreement. It would mean disaster to have dividends high and wages low, or vice versa. The way to check a threatened depression is to lower prices and raise wages. The wage motive starts with the employer and not the employe. The employer must make a product to help people and not just something to sell. Before a man can call himself a businessman,, he must want to get the most from his labor and materials, charge the lowest possible price, and pay the highest possible wage. But the worker also must be willing to do a good days work. "The starting point of high wages is willingness to work," said Ford.[2] "Make work" schemes

[2]R. M. Fox "Fordism, A Critical Examination" Nineteenth Century, Feb. 1927, p. 234.

are bad because they raise unit labor costs, which mean price increases, thus nullifying any wage increases which may be granted. The employer must pay the highest possible wage and charge the least he can for his product. In this way the economy will be healthy. The worker must be able to buy the product he makes. At first glance, said Ford, labor saving machinery appears to throw people out of work, but over the long period of time the opposite happens. By using machines, the unit labor costs will be lower, making lower selling prices possible. This fact will create higher demand, thus employing more people rather than less.

According to Ford, there was no place for democracy in business. The employee must have nothing to say in the determination of his wages or working conditions. "Business holds no place for democracy, if by democracy is meant the shaping of policies by the vote of a large number of people or their delegates. The theory of democratic government as applied to a nation has never proved sufficiently practical even to be tried in business. This is because the theory makes no provision at all for getting anything done. It starts and stops with discussion."[3]

Business has to have something more than discussion. It demands action. The employees of a firm should never be allowed

[3]Henry Ford, Moving Forward, (New York 1930) p. 146.

to vote on company policy because they do not know what is going on, and even if they did they would act to slowly. One man who sees clearly the whole picture must run business. Business will not be run properly unless everything is according to a plan, and most of all the management must see that they are carried out by the workers. The plan and schedule must end in a service or a product. The plant is a tool the manager uses to serve society.

Henry Ford was not opposed to the organization of labor into unions.[4] He was, however, opposed to the limitation of production. Limiting production instead of creating more jobs, creates fewer. It makes the cost of a product so high that it will be beyond the reach of most people According to Ford, "The only real labor leaders are those who lead men to work . . . "[5]

Ford further stated that labor agitators and socialists are merely misfits, living from union salaries, paid by the members. They merely agitated to build up their "class struggle" idea to prove that they are needed.[6]

In respect to personnel policy, Ford said, "The best social spirit is evidenced by some act which costs management

[4]Henry Ford, My Life And Work (New York 1923) p. 254.

[5]Ibid., p. 256.

[6]Allan Nevins and Frank Ernest Hill, Ford Expansion and Challenge, 1915 to 1933. (New York 1957) p. 535.

something and which benefits all. This is the only way to prove good intentions and win respect. Propaganda, bulletins, lectures, they are nothing. It's the right act sincerely done that counts."[7]

Conversely Ford also said that the employee in a business must be also able to perform his job adequately, otherwise he must go. In My Life and Work, Ford states, "We make no attempt to coddle the people who work with us," and "We do not believe in the 'glad hand' or the professionalized 'personal touch'. or the human element."[8]

In answer to the question of charity Ford stated,"My gospel is work. The best use to which I can put my money is to make more work for more men."[9]

The best charity was giving jobs, paying high wages, lowering car prices, and thus creating spending power in the economy. The greatest cure for poverty was the development of work habits. Every man who works, helps to drive poverty out of the world. Sympathy is wrongly manifested in charity. Sympathy should go to remove the cause of poverty, not just temporarily alleviate it. "The best charity is to help a man to

[7]Henry Ford, My Life and Work, (New York 1923) p. 260.

[8]Ibid., p. 163.

[9]Samuel Marquis, Henry Ford, An Interpretation, (Boston 1923) p. 39.

a place where he will never need charity."[10]

Working conditions at Ford were better than the average of the automobile industry, and very good for industry as a whole. According to Ford, a shop that was ill-lighted, dirty and unkept was condusive to inefficiency and immorality. In the Ford Plant no worker ever had to stand on a dirty floor. The floors were scrubbed every eight hours and 500 brooms and mops were worn out every five days by 4,000 janitors. Rubbish cans were emptied every two hours.

The interior of the Ford Plant was also very well lighted. There were many windows and they were constantly being washed. An abundance of windows, letting in light made working more healthful and safe, and at the same time cutting down on light bills. To reflect the light the interior walls were painted an eggshell white, above the wainscoating. The floors and the walls up to the wainscoating were painted olive green. The machines were painted "machine blue." The forbidden areas as well as many safety devices were painted red. Five thousand gallons of blue paint was used a month as well as 11,000 gallons of white.[11] Great quantities of cement paint, rubber base paint, and aluminum paint were also used in the Ford Plant during the twenties. The Ford Plant in the twenties was dotted with morale boosting signs, written by Ford, such as:[12]

[10]Henry Ford, Moving Forward, (New York 1930), p. 118.

[11]Nevins, Ford, Expansion and Challenge, 1915 to 1933 p. 511.

[12]Henry Hamilton, Henry Ford, The Man The Worker, The Citizen, (New York 1927) p. 217.

"People are all right," "Help the other fellow", and "Cut your own wood, and it will warm you twice."

The Ford medical department was also very active in achieving cleanliness in the Ford Plant. This department regulated the water temperature of the 2300 drinking fountains in the plant. The department also sterilized all telephones every twenty-four hours, and all goggles and other safety appliances after each shift. The coat racks and rest rooms were also regularily disinfected. The safety department also supervised the installation of an air suction system which removed particles of metal dust from the plant, the first of its kind in the country.

The Ford workers were given in the twenties, ten minutes for lunch. The lunch could be carried or bought from one of the 200 lunch wagons that circulated through the plant. These box lunches were carefully prepared and tested for the proper balance of calories and vitamins.

All employees who received the slightest scratch while working were urged to report to the nearest first aid station. If the case was not serious, the patient was treated on the spot. If he was seriously injured he was promptly taken to Ford Hospital.[13]

[13]Nevins, Ford Expansion and Challenge, 1915 to 1933, pp. 513-514.

In 1927, the Medical Transfer Division was created for the purpose of placing employees with physical deficiencies in departments where the physical condition would best suit them. Under this system many blind,deaf, and tuberculosis cases were given jobs at Ford. A few years prior to this when disabled World War I veterans sought jobs at Ford, according to Dr. Meade, the Director of the Division, no one was turned down, unless he was suffering from a contagious disease, whereupon, he was taken to Ford Hospital, cured, and then given a job.[14] According to Dr. Meade, on November 1, 1917, 6,054 men in the Ford Plant were in an either crippled or diseased condition. There were three men without legs, fifty-four with a leg or foot missing, twenty-two with an arm or hand missing, and two totally blind. Eighty-five per cent of these men were fully efficient in their particular jobs. In 1918 out of 33,000 employees, 9,563 were physically below par. There were in 1923, thirty-seven deaf and dumb, sixty epileptics, and 1,031 employees minus fingers or thumbs, employed at Ford.[15]

Safety conditions in the Ford Plant were very good.

[14] "Employment of Cripples In A Large Industrial Plant," Monthly Labor Review, Dec. 1918, p. 1255.

[15] "Training and Employment of Disabled Workmen," Monthly Labor Review, Nov. 1923, pp. 1163-64.

After World War I, there was no more belting and each machine had its own individual drive. Most machines had alarms, bells, guards, locks, and shields. All these apparatuses were painted red.[16]

There were two causes of accidents in the Ford Plant, internal and external. Internal reasons could be traced to carelessness, the mental state of the worker, loss of sleep or problems at home. External causes could be traced to improper protection of machinery, bad machinery arrangement, or insufficient light. External causes were the easiest to correct by the use of protective devices such as guards or shields. In the Ford Plant every belt was surrounded by a cage or guard. Railings and iron fences were erected around furnaces and heat-treating vats. Isles were well defined, and all monorail isles were well marked. There were wire guards around the presses, and tin shields on the lathes. Also "safety," "danger," and "to stop this machine pull plug" signs were numerous in the shop. The plant was also fully equipped with fire hoses and extinguishers. There were also periodic inspections of clothing.

Working rules and discipline differed little from these in the other auto plants during the twenties. There was

[16]Nevins, Ford, Expansion and Challenge, 1915 to 1933. pp. 510-11.

to be no talking or sitting down on the part of the worker. Talking according to Ford, took the worker's attention from his job and made him more likely to have an accident. Also the men stood at their benches all day. Time margins were strictly watched at Ford. When the starting bell rang the men were required to be at their benches with their tools out and ready to go. The workers then worked steadily until the noon bell rang. In addition the worker stayed at his bench until the quitting bell rang. Quitting a few minutes early to "wash up" was unheard of.[17] In the early days before World War I, a dismissal could be appealed, but by the nineteen twenties dismissal by the foreman was final. The workers at Ford always had to be wearing their badges. If a worker was caught without his badge, he would be dismissed. If he was found to be consistently wearing his badge in a place other than on his left lapel, he was in some cases sent home for two weeks. Smoking was prohibited in the Ford Plant, and there was even an attempt to stop chewing, but that failed. Before 1920, Ford welcomed suggestions from his employees, but by 1922 this practice was dead. The spirit of the factory after 1920 was not stimulating, but repressive.[18] Absence without notice was

[17]Nevins, Ford, Expansion and Challenge, 1915 to 1933, p. 514.

[18]Edwin P. Norwood, Ford, Men And Methods, (New York, 1931) p. 518.

strictly against the rules in the Ford Plant during the nineteen twenties. If a worker who was absent without notice returned with an excuse of being sick he was taken to the medical office where his cause was investigated. If it was valid, he was admonished and sent back to work but if not, he was fired.

In the Ford Plant, as has been said before, the worker could learn most jobs very rapidly. In two days an unexperienced man could be made into a first class coremaker. Toolmakers, experimental room hands, patternmakers, and draftsmen formed the aristocracy in the Ford Plant. The toolmakers learned their craft outside Ford and worked for the prevailing union scale.[19] The plant did however, train its own machinists. In addition to this training, Ford also started the Henry Ford Trade School and the Ford Service School during the second decade of the twentieth century. Ford's philosophy toward education centered around the thought that a person should be educated for life and not for education alone. True education would turn a person toward work, and not away from it. It would enable a person to live a better life.

The Henry Ford Trade School was started for boys aged sixteen to twenty years. These boys had to show a great deal of promise, and also be unable to obtain an education elsewhere.

[19]Interview - George Dean, President of Michigan State Federation of Labor. (A. F. of L.) January 20, 1958, Lansing, Michigan.

Many were the sons of widows or were orphans. Out of the 750 boys in the Trade School in 1926 fifty were orphans, 300 were the sons of widows, 170 were sons of Ford employees, and 200 were from other sources. By 1926, 400 boys had been graduated from the school. When a boy first started in the trade school, he was given a scholarship which paid $7.20 a week. This scholarship was gradually raised to $18.00.[20] In addition each boy received $2.00 a month as thrift money. The school was governed by three principles:[21]

1. A boy was to be kept a boy, not made into a premature man.
2. Academic training was to go hand-in-hand with industrial training.
3. A boy was to be given a sense of responsibility while being trained.

The boys spent two thirds of this time in the shop, and one third in the classroom. The subjects they took in class were English, Mechanical Drawing, Physics, Chemistry, and Trigonometry. The boys graduated after three years in the school. They were offered positions at Ford, but some went to other firms. In addition to the trade school, the Ford Motor Company

[20]Henry Ford, Today and Tomorrow, (New York, 1926), pp. 177-85.

[21]Ibid., pp. 177-85.

also maintained the Service School for the purpose of educating newly arrived immigrants. These schools taught Economics, English, United States History, and American Government. The classes were not held on company time. Attendance was not compulsary, but highly recommended.[22]

On the fifth of January 1914, Ford declared he was going to divide among his workers a bonus amounting to ten million dollars a year. This would bring the lowest minimum wage to $5.00 a day. Also in this year hours were reduced from nine to eight. The first effect of this announcement was to make Ford famous. He became one of America's heroes over night. The businessmen called him a traitor to his class, and the newspapers called him a statesman of industry. On the first day of the $5.00 day there were 10,000 men at the gates of the Highland Plant looking for work. The actual wage was to remain the same but a bonus was to paid every two weeks. Also only workers who qualified were paid the bonus. To qualify a married man had to be living with his wife and supporting his family. Single men over twenty-two had to be living wholesomely, and be of "proud and thrifty habits".[23] All men under twenty-two had to be the sole support/er of some next of kin.

[22]Hamilton, Henry Ford, The Man The Worker, The Citizen, (New York 1927), p. 232.

[23]Upton Sinclair, The Fliver King, (Pasadena, Calif. 1937) p. 64.

Also none of those receiving the bonus could take boarders in their homes, consume alcoholic beverages, have unclean homes, or sickly children. To perform the function of ascertaining the facts, Ford set up a social department of fifty men. A clergyman, Dr. S. S. Marquis,was placed in charge. Sixty per cent of the employees received the bonus at once. At the end of six months seventy-five per cent shared, and at the end of one year eighty-seven per cent shared. From then on ninety-nine plus per cent shared.[24] A. Nevins in his book, Ford Expansion and Challenge, placed the percentage somewhere between a third and a half.

Ford's purpose in giving the bonus according to J. G. Hamilton was to help to attain his goal of having all his employees of good character and good citizens. Ford, said J. G. Hamilton, wanted all his employees prosperous and contented.[25] Keith Sward says, he gave the bonus to keep the Industrial Workers of the World from organizing his plant. Starting in 1913, says Keith Sward the Industrial Workers of the World began preaching outside of Ford's Plant in Highland Park. They also called a strike in 1913 for the eight hour day, and weekly pay days at the Detroit plant of Studebaker.

[24]Hamilton, Henry Ford, The Man The Worker, The Citizen, p. 216.

[25]Ibid., p. 220

The Industrial Workers of the World paper The Emancipator began calling Ford the "speedup king", and the "proprietor of the sweat shop". At first the Ford officials had the "wobblie" organizers jailed each time they appeared outside the plant. In the summer of 1914 the grapevine had it, that the Industrial Workers of the World were going to strike Ford.[26] James Couzens, according to Sward, came to the rescue by proposing the $5.00 day. Also accompaning the $5.00 day was the speedup. Due to the speedup profits were running from $100,000,000 to $150,000,000 a year by the nineteen twenties.[27] Ford says in his book Today and Tomorrow, that the $5.00 day provided a great deal of incentive for Ford workers. It encouraged them to give their all, and to do their best. He says nothing of a speedup.[28] In addition the $5.00 brought a decreased turnover in the Ford Plant. Before the bonus the turnover was as high as fourteen per cent a day. After the bonus the rate fell sixty per cent. In 1919, out of 60,000 at River Rouge there was an average turnover of only eighty men per day. Keith Sward here charges that this was the glut of labor in Detroit, brought about by the bonus. The men could

[26]Keith Sward, The Legend of Henry Ford, (New York 1948) p. 50.

[27]Reinhold Niebuhr, "How Philanthrophic Is Henry Ford" Christian Century, December 9, 1926, p. 1516.

[28]Ford, Today and Tomorrow, p. 160.

be replaced very easily.[29] Keith Sward in his condemnation of Ford, fails to recognize Ford's philosophy of wages and buying power. Ford states that in order to buy mass produced goods the workers must have a high wage. This would create purchasing power and more prosperity for everyone. That was the reason for the $5.00 day, and not the threat of the Industrial Workers of the World. From 1914 to 1927, the cost of living doubled in Detroit, while the weekly Ford minimum wage remained the same at $30.00. By 1925, the Ford average weekly wage was lower than that of the industry as a whole, the Ford wage being $30.00, while the average for the industry was $36.67. By 1919 the cost of living had jumped 108 per cent over 1914. The $5.00 was worth only $2.40.[30] Also along with the $5.00 day came a closer surveillance of the employees. With the coming of the bonus, and the speedups, however, Ford was able to cut the price of the Model T. Keith Sward with all his talk about speedups and increased earnings, failed to mention this fact.

By the end of World War I, the five-dollar day had lost its magic. There was also a great deal of labor unrest in the plant. Ford, at first, tried to fight these things by work. He started the company publication, The Ford Man, and employed

[29] Sward, The Legend of Henry Ford, pp. 50-63.

[30] Nevins, Ford, Expansion and Challenge, 1915 to 1933, p. 325.

Edgar A. Guest to compose such poems as "Stick To The Job You've Got." When these attempts failed, Ford set his minimum wage at six dollars a day. According to Keith Sward, he reimbursed himself by introducing another speedup. The result was more cars produced, in proportion to the six dollar day, than the number produced during the five dollar day, and thus higher profits. Ford called the six dollar day, "one of the finest cost-cutting moves we ever made".[31] In 1921 Ford produced the same number of cars with forty per cent fewer employees than in 1920. In 1920 there were fewer workers than in 1919, but double the number of cars were produced. Some of this production increase was due to more efficient labor saving machinery. After the $6.00 day was inaugurated only the most efficient, strongest, and most willing of the employees could survive. Even though the six dollar day brought an increase in pay, the real wages of the Ford workers were still lower than they had been in 1913, and in many cases workers were pushed back to a four and one-half day week, making wages lower. In 1922 the Ford weekly wage was higher than the average of the industry as a whole. The Ford wage was $36.00 a week (assuring full time) while the average of the industry was $32.92. With the six-dollar day and the speedup, came a demand for younger men. Young men could work harder, and keep

[31]Sward, Legend Of Henry Ford, p. 75.

up to the pace of the line. Old men were discharged, regardless of the number of years service. Edmund Wilson, in his book, American Jitters, remarked that, "A man checks his brains and his freedom at the door when he goes to work at Ford's."[32] Reinhold Niebuhr bitterly stated in 1926, that "The auto industry is too young to have a conscience."[33] These speedups during the twenties were due to the actions of Ford, but to a greater extent the policies of Sorensen and Bennett.

In the fall of 1926, Ford introduced the five instead of six day week. The men were to be paid six days pay for five days work. The purpose of the move, said Ford, was not to decrease wages, but to enable the workers to earn their present income in five sixths of the time. Also Ford said the man that has two leisure days per week will have more time to enjoy and use his automobile. There will be more consumption on the part of the worker. This will make for more production and higher profits.[34] Reinhold Niebuhr, in an article in Christian Century stated that the five day week came as a cover up for the decreased demand for Ford cars.[35] Although Ford said that the

[32]Edmund Wilson, The American Jitters, (New York, 1932), Chapter 8, p. 46.

[33]Reinhold Niebuhr, Christian Century, Dec. 9, 1926, p. 1517.

[34]"The Five Day Week In The Ford Plant," Monthly Labor Review, Dec. 1926, p. 1162.

workers would receive six days pay for five days work, a wage reduction did follow very shortly. The average Ford worker lost $4.00 a week in pay. At the same time the assembly line was speeded up to put production twenty-five per cent greater than during the six day week. Sorensen also began his policy of discovering and eliminating the "drones." One man in six was discharged. The five day week paid for itself many times over as a result of the tremendous speedups that followed.

In Detroit the cost of living had jumped one hundred per cent since 1914. In 1925 the Ford weekly wage was $4.21 below the average for the industry, and in 1928 they were $1.27 below. Despite, however, the reductions in earnings in late 1926, the average rate of pay went up for the years 1925, 1926, and 1927. In 1927, 45,000 workers got pay increases of $.40 an hour until the worker reached $7.20 a day. From the $7.22 on up, it was very difficult to get a raise. In the years from 1925 to 1927, the weekly pay rate rose by an average of $4.68. During the year 1927 the average rate of hourly pay was 93.6 cents.[36]

In 1927, the Ford Motor Company closed down to retool for the new Model A. Sixty-thousand men were out of work for one year.[37]

[36]Nevins, Ford, Expansion and Challenge, 1915 to 1933, p. 1517.

[37]P. U. Kellogg, "When Mass Production Stalls," Survey, March 1, 1928, p. 682.

The Ford shut down was responsible for forty-five per cent of the unemployment in the city of Detroit in 1927. Yet Ford, being outside the city paid no taxes. At this time Ford stated: "I know it has done them a lot of good, if there is any unemployment in America, it is because the unemployed do not want to work."[38]

Although at first speedups came with the new model, the assembly line pace by 1929 had slowed down a considerable extent. According to E. P. Norwood the worker must work at a brisk, but not tiring pace.[39] In addition to E. P. Norwood, Stanley B. Mathewson, who completed a survey of Ford conditions in 1930, found that the Ford workers had no difficulty in keeping up with the assembly line. The assembly line speed by this time was not excessive.

In 1929, Ford, after attending a White House conference of business and labor leaders, declared a $7.00 minimum daily wage in his plants. Ford declared that the purchasing power of the nation must be held up, and the way to accomplish this was by higher wages. The $7.00 day was maintained for about two years. At first it did instill some confidence but as the depression deepened, and the workers worked fewer seven-dollar

[38]Sward, The Legend of Henry Ford, p. 20.

[39]Edwin P. Norwood, Ford Men And Methods, p. 9.

days the figure gradually lost some of its luster. Also the Ford Motor Company began diverting an increasing share of its sub-assembly work to suppliers, who for the most part paid very low wages. In 1929 there were 2200 concerns supplying Ford, while in 1930 there were 5800. The Auto Workers News charged that the Briggs Company which made forty-three per cent of Ford bodies, cut its wages from fifteen to fifty per cent in 1930, and from five to thirty per cent in 1931.[40] In 1932 unskilled workers were being paid twenty-five cents an hour. The Kelsey-Hayes Wheel Company, another supplier, cut the wages of toolmakers from $1.10 to $.80 an hour. The Detroit Gear Company laid off all its men who were earning $.90, and hired them all back at $.73 an hour. In 1930, 80,000 men were out of work at Rouge Plant because of the farming out of assemblies to suppliers.[41]

Hours of work in the Ford plant remained about the same throughout the nineteen twenties. The office hours were from: 8:15 A. M., to 12:00 noon and 1:00 P. M. to 5:15 P. M.

The factory worker might work any one of three shifts.

First shift: 12:00 Midnight to 8:00 A. M.

4:00 to 4:10 lunch period.

[40] Auto Worker's News, May 1930.

[41] R. L. Cruden, "The Great Ford Myth". New Republic, March 16, 1932, pp. 116-119.

The workers did not leave their places during lunch periods.

Second shift: 8:00 A. M. to 4:00 P. M.
12:00 noon to 12:10 Lunch

Third shift: 4:00 P. M. to 12:00 Midnight
8:00 to 8:10 Lunch

The shifts of machinists, car assemblers, testers, shipping and stores employees, receiving department employees, laborers and truckers:

First shift: 6:30 A. M. to 10:30 A. M.
30 minutes for lunch
11:00 A. M. to 3:00 P. M.

Second shift: 3:30 P. M. to 7:30 P. M.
10 minutes for lunch
7:40 P. M. to 11:40 P. M.

The draftsmen only worked one shift.
8:00 A. M. to 5:00 P. M.

Throughout the first half of the decade of the twenties the morale of the employees at Ford grew steadily lower. After 1925, and the end of the speed drive, the morale remained at a low ebb but static. There was grumbling about the wages, hours and working conditions in the Ford Plant during the twenties. The work was no doubt hard, and the policies of Bennett and Sorensen were oppressive. But it also must be remembered that the conditions at Ford were better than those of the auto industry as a whole, and far better than for all industry.

CHAPTER IV

EFFORTS TO KEEP THE UNION OUT

In the nineteen twenties the auto manufacturers were not only non-union, but anti-union. They employed every possible means to keep the unions out of their plants as did manufacturers in many other industries.

One method by which the automobile employers insured themselves against labor unions was by forming organizations among themselves. The National Automobile Chamber of Commerce, one such organization, included all Detroit auto makers except Ford. Each member of this organization reported its production figures each month, and in turn was provided with the production figures of all the other members. Also this organization established a cross patent system among its members. All the members together had a total of 300 patents between them. Each could use a patent belonging to any other member.[1] Others were the National Automobile Dealers Association, The Motor and Equipment Association, and the Motor and Accessory Manufacturers Association. These organizations included all those who were not in the Automobile Chamber of Commerce, with the exception of Ford, who was not a member of any of these organizations. The National Automobile Dealers Association took an agressive stand

[1] Ralph C. Epstein, The Automobile Industry Its Economic and Commercial Development, (New York 1928), pp. 236-37.

when the machinist union tried to form the garage mechanics in Chicago.[2] The association instructed the garage owners to screen carefully all their employees for union activity, particularly those hired within a recent period of time. All those suspected of union leanings were to be discharged and blacklisted. Every auto dealer was to find out the extent of union activity in his city. If any union men called upon the dealer he was to refuse to discuss union activities. If the union organization campaign was vigorous and persistent, the association would send help in the form of thugs and spies. The National Automobile Dealers Association had an excellent espionage system serving its members with reports of union activity and membership. Another body that worked against organization was the Employers' Club of Detroit. This organization coined the slogan, "Detroit is Detroit because of the open shop." The members met once a month chiefly for the purpose of exchanging information and reaching agreement on wages, hiring practice, and general personnel relations. Dunn in his book, Labor And Autos, charges that members helped one another to end their labor troubles. If a member had a strike in his plant the others lent their workers as strike breakers. Some of the other employer organizations were the

[2] The New York Times, July 9, 1927.

Michigan Manufacturers Association, the Manufacturers Association of Flint, and the Pontiac Manufacturers Association.[3]

The Employers' Association of Detroit spent $100,000 to break the building trades unions in Detroit in 1925. Twenty-five thousand dollars of this was contributed by Fisher Body. The organization also fought the A. F. L. when it held its convention in Detroit in 1926. The Auto Workers News charges that, in 1927 this organization, with the aid of the Citizens Committee, conducted a company to keep the A. F. L. out of the Detroit auto plants.[4]

Charles W. Nash once told a group of men that "if labor ever tried to organize his plants he would close them up".[5] In the Nash Plants, men talking unionism were discharged, and in 1928, Nash himself, contributed heavily to a campaign to drive the Hosiery Union out of the City of Kenosha, Wisconsin, Nash's home city. Also, during the twenties, General Motors conducted a great and constant campaign to keep the union out of its plants. This consisted of Yellow-Dog contracts, company unions and labor spies. The Murray Body Company's Yellow-Dog contract

[3]Dunn, Labor And Automobiles, p. 167.

[4]Auto Workers News, May 19, 1928.

[5]Op. Cit., p. 170.

reads as follows: "As an employee of the Murray Corporation of America, I understand that I am working under open shop regulations. That no union or shop committee is recognized and that wage adjustment will be made from time to time when deemed advisable after careful study of conditions and methods by the management."[6] Also General Motors battled the coal union, by refusing to buy coal from union operated mines. Union papers, if found on a worker, were grounds for dismissal. When a union paper was distributed in front of a Pontiac General Motor Plant in 1926 the distributors were arrested on charges of; disorderly conduct, distributing literature that tended to disturb the peace, scattering paper on the sidewalks, and interfering with the plant employees. The Auto Workers News was prohibited from sale several times at Lansing, Detroit, Flint, Pontiac, and Toledo.[7]

The LaFollette Senate sub-committee investigating civil liberties revealed that many private detective agencies furnished spies to the auto plants in the twenties. In one year alone, Chrysler paid $72,611 to the Corporation's Auxiliary Agency, a labor spy and information service. There were

[6] Auto Workers News, Sept. 1929.

[7] Dunn, Labor And Automobiles, pp. 172-3.

228 such agencies in the country, serving all industry.[8] Where the machinists attempted to organize the auto repair garages, the Chicago Auto Trades Association promptly hired spies to discover who the unionists were.

According to Leo Huberman, the labor spy would hire out in the plant and work along with the men.[9] He would move into the neighborhood of the workers, and generally fraternize with them. If there was a union in the plant, the spy would sttend all the meetings, and probably get himself elected to an office. When the spy would go to his home in the evening he would write a detailed report of the day's happenings, where he went, whomhe met, what they said, who were the union's officers, who attended the meetings and so on. He would mail the report to the agency headquarters, where it would be edited and returned to the employer. When not occupied with union business the spies circulated freely around the worker neighborhoods, and in the places where the workers congregated.[10]

In addition to coercing the workers to stay out of unions, the employers openly wooed them. A way of doing this

[8]Herbert Harris, "Revolt of the Robots", Current History, April 1938, p. 49.

[9]Leo Huberman, The Labor Spy, (New York 1937) pp.34-49.

[10]United States Congress, Senate Committee on Education and Labor. Violations of Free Speech And Right Of Labor. Hearings 74th Congress, 2nd Session (U. S. Government Printing Office, 1936-1941) Part 169 B, p. 1182.

was to institute a profit sharing program. Two outstanding such programs were those of Ford and Studebaker. The Ford profit sharing program was instituted in 1915, popularly known as the five dollar day. The plan reduced employee turnover and also quieted any union stirrings. Before this time, Ford paid a bonus in 1909 amounting to $80,000, and in 1913 a $200,000 bonus was distributed. The actual wages in the 1915 plan were the same per day, but the bonus made the actual take home pay $5.00. For example if a worker earned $.26 per hour, $2.34 per day, he was given a daily bonus of $2.66 for a total of $5.00. The profit was simply added to the wage.[11] The system was dissolved by 1919. Throughout the 1920's the workers were paid a flat rate, with no bonus attached. The bonus plan was terminated because of the opposition of Ford executives, principally Sorensen, and later Bennett, growing skepticism of Ford himself and a great increase in administration costs.[12] The old Sociological Department had disappeared by 1920. In the opinion of S. M. Levin, an economics instructor at the City College of Detroit, however, the real reason for the failure and ultimate termination of the plan was that when the plan was introduced the cost of living in Detroit rose so

[11]S. M. Levin, "Ford Profit Sharing," Personnel Journal, August 1927, pp. 75-86.

[12]S. M. Levin, "The End of Ford Profit Sharing," Personnel Journal, October 1927, pp. 161-170.

rapidly and so far, that the plan was abandoned.

The directors of Studebaker adopted a profit-sharing plan for management in 1914, and a wage dividend plan for labor in 1917. In 1919 it increased the rates and also granted vacations with pay. All employees from executives down to and including foremen, who held positions of authority, were classed as management. Also this position might involve the spending or committing of the corporation's money. Labor was defined as the great body of men who have no responsibility, other than the daily performance of their jobs. The first profit-sharing plan for the year 1914 was to be paid, provided the profit on the common stock equaled three per cent after seven per cent on the preferred stock. If the profits exceeded the above amount, twelve per cent of the first million, fourteen per cent of the next million, and fifteen per cent of the excess would go into the fund.[13] These percentages were lowered as the decades of the teens and twenties wore on.

The recipients of the plan were divided into groups;

I - Several high officials (six)

II - Next ten.

III - Next twenty.

IV - The rest.

[13] Albert R. Erskine, History of the Studebaker Corp., (South Bend, Ind. 1924) p. 115.

The groups received their payment in one half cash and one-half common stock, which was held in trust. Twenty-five per cent of the stock was paid the first year; twenty-five per cent the second year, and fifty per cent the third year. If a worker quit the company before the three years was up, he lost all his stock.[14]

The co-operative plans for labor, as adopted by the corporation were not stictly profit-sharing plans, as the payments under them were fixed expenses. These payments were made before dividend payments and were put at the fixed cost of the company. These payments were in addition to and not in place of wages. Continuous service was necessary in order for payment under the plan. An absence of thirty days, if for illness, was accepted, but chronic late-comers or immoral employees were not accepted. Only employees "who were steady and true" were under the plan. With an average, in 1923, of 17,094 workers at Studebaker, 11,376, received checks under the plan.[15]

Studebaker also had an employee (labor) stock purchase plan. Employees were allowed to subscribe up to twenty per cent of their annual pay to the purchase of common stock. Ten

[14]Erskine, History of the Studebaker Corporation, p. 117.

[15]Ibid., p. 119.

per cent was paid down and the rest was paid in monthly installments amounting to three per cent of the purchase price. All the cash dividends were accredited to the employee. Employees also received dividend checks on each anniversary date at Studebaker during the twenties at the rate of:[16]

5 per cent - first - fourth year

10 per cent - fifth year on.

Upon completion of two year's service each Studebaker employee was to receive a week's vacation with pay.

The company also had an employee pension plan. Each employee, whose earnings averaged not more than $3,000 a year for the preceding five years and reached the age of sixty years, could retire on a pension. The pension rate was twenty-five per cent of the average rate of pay in the five year directly preceding retirement. The minimum was $30.00 a month. In 1923 sixty-eight employees were receiving benefits from the pension plan.

Dependents of deceased employees of Studebaker, with five years service or longer who were earning less than $3,000 at the time of their death received a cash payment of $5,000. The toal expense of the co-operating department for 1923 was $1,993,360, plus $358,036, which went for the maintenance of the employment office, hospital, bank, and the publication of the employee magazine.[17]

[16]Erskine, History of the Studebaker Corporation, p. 123.

[17]Ibid., p. 129.

Other employee activities of Studebaker consisted of glee clubs, bowling teams, basketball team, bands and symphony orchestras, men's clubs, baseball team, picnics, banquets, and outings.

In Ford during the twenties there were male choruses, bands, orchestras, athletics, picnics, general get-togethers, a company store which sold goods at a cut rate, and legal aid for the employees.[18] In addition there were the schools.

In the Buick Plant there was a newspaper called the Buick Family which had tidbits about the company band, feather parties, horse-shoe pitching tournaments, twenty-year emblem receivers, and the company bowling team.[19]

The Cadillac Craftsman published news about the company bathing beauty contest, poetry, honeymoon pictures, and the progress of the factory athletic teams. Also there was news about picnics, "kiddies parties," the girls ukulele club, the glee club, and the winners of the photo contest. There were also many "self-help" quotations from Harvey Firestone, and Andrew Carnegie. The Budd Company published a paper called the "Buddgette." All the employees were called "Buddites" and their children "junior "Buddites."[20] The

[18]Nevins, "Ford Profit Sharing," Personnel Journal, August 1927, pp. 75-86.

[19]Dunn, Labor And Automobiles, p. 149.

[20]Ibid., p. 156.

Packard employee paper expounded upon the success of the company bowling teams, and the different workers who had five, ten, and twenty-five year pins. The paper state that all Packard employees must become citizens, and "practice Americanism in their daily lives".

The Studebaker magazine, the Studebaker Co-operator, contained pictures of the foremen, marriage news, and the results of the company baseball teams.[21]

Many plants conducted raffles and failure to purchase a ticket could be grounds for discharge.[22]

In Lansing the Reo Motor Car Company published the Reo Spirit, which contained news of the company baseball and horseshoe pitching teams, news of the band, the annual Reo employee's ball held in the Reo Clubhouse, and the annual picnic. This firm also had a large and well-stocked employee library, and a free movie once a week. The Reo Band was well known throughout the midwest, and was considered by many authorities on the subject, as almost a professional organization. The band had a very large and complete library of music, and in its later days played weekly concerts over a Lansing radio station in addition to its regular concerts.

[21] Auto Workers News, June 1927.

[22] Ibid., March 1928.

Many of these employer recreation programs, were sincerely instituted for employee entertainment and betterment, but all had the effect of discouraging union membership.

CHAPTER V

ORGANIZING EFFORTS BEFORE 1926

American labor organizations entered upon a period of retrogression after World War I, which lasted until the New Deal. The total union membership in 1920, numbered five million and in 1926 the membership was 4,450,000. During the twenties, only about twenty-two per cent of the labor force was organized.[1] The losing of both the coal and steel strikes in 1921 were heavy blows to organized labor. The depression of 1921 and the "Red Scare" also were harmful to labor's interests. The courts also hurt labor by their use of the injunction.

Management by its use of spies, the Yellow Dog contract, and employer associations managed to keep labor on the run, and the "American Plan" in effect. The unions themselves were also divided in the period. The A. F. of L. did not care to organize the large industries unless it could do it on a craft basis, which was practically impossible. The inability of organized labor to penetrate such industries as autos, steel, food packing, rubber, and others was partially due to the indifferent attitude of craft union leaders. Many A. F. of L. leaders both feared and looked down upon industrial unionism.[2]

[1] S. M. Levin, "Ford Profit Sharing," Personnel Journal, August 1927, p. 509.

[2] Ibid., p. 509.

Despite the open shop or "American Plan", there was some organizing activity being carried on in the auto plants during the early twenties. This work was being done primarily by two unions, the Machinists Union and the Auto Workers Union.

In 1919, the Machinists Union claimed 7,000 to 10,000 members in Detroit. Some of these men were in the automobile industry.[3] During this year the union conducted a strike against the Timken Roller Bearing Company's Detroit Plant, which R. Dunn says involved 4,500 workers and lasted a month.[4] The strike was called on May 16, at 9:00 in the morning. Some weeks before the company had cut pay rates and lengthened hours. When the shop committee protested, the company promised to restore the old rates. This promise was never made good, and finally the workers voted to strike at a meeting on the evening of May 15. The strikers demanded a minimum of $6.00 a day and an eight hour day.[5] Colored strike breakers were brought in from Toledo, Ohio, and normal operations at Timken were resumed, contrary to R. W. Dunn's statement that the plant was closed for a month.[6] The pickets remained for

[3]Dunn, Labor And Automobiles, pp. 184-85.

[4]Ibid., p. 184.

[5]Detroit Labor News, May 23, 1919.

[6]Ibid., June 6, 1919.

five weeks at which time an injunction was issued against them by circuit court Judge Charles Marschmer. Between the strike breakers and the injunction the workers were beaten; they were permanently dismissed and blacklisted.[7] Also in 1919 the union conducted a strike against the Willys-Overland Company in Toledo, Ohio. The company increased hours from forty-four to forty-eight weekly, and lowered wages. It looked out all employees who refused the offer. Led by the machinists the 13,000 employees turned the walkout into a strike. There were three shifts of pickets at the Willys Plant, and up to May 8, 1919, there was no violence. On May 9, however, when non-striking workers tried to cross the picket line, they were beaten and stoned. The police intervened and dispersed the rioters.[8] The next day 500 ex-soldiers were sworn in as extra police deputies, and order was kept for approximately two weeks, during which time strike breakers operated the Willys Plant. Early in the evening of June 3, a pitched battle occurred between 150 non-strikers and 300 strikers.[9] The battle occurred as the non-strikers were entering the plant on board two railway passenger cars pulled by a switch engine. Sixteen of the ex-soldier deputies armed with repeating rifles who were on hand at the time intervened. As a result three persons were killed

[7]Detroit Labor News, August 8, 1919.

[8]The New York Times, May 8, 1919.

[9]Ibid., June 4, 1919.

and many more wounded, either from bullets or flying bricks. The next day strikers also stoned a streetcar which was loaded with strike breakers. Workers in the Willys-Overland Plant in Detroit, who had not gone out on strike,were beaten as they entered the plant, by strikers from Toledo.[10] On the same day, the Willys-Overland management sent a message to New York importing sixty to seventy more strike breakers. At 1:00 A. M. the next morning, the mayor of Toledo, when aroused from bed. by rocks being thrown through his front window, sent word to Governor Cox of Ohio, asking for state troops to keep the city safe from the strikers. The governor refused on the grounds that the situation was not out of control.[11]

Federal Judge. John M. Killits, on Saturday, June 7, issued a restraining order prohibiting the strikers from interfering with the non-strikers. Peaceful picketing was permitted, but the picket had to be an American citizen. The following Monday, twenty-five secret service men arrived from Washington, D. C., to enforce the order. The plant resumed full scale production the next day, with the aid of the strike breakers, and the secret service men. The strike was broken. On July 18, the Willys-Overland Plant announced it would suspend its profit-

[10]The New York Times, June 4, 1919.

[11]Ibid., June 5, 1919.

sharing program for the preceding quarter. The company said, "Owing to the unjust strike, instead of making a profit in the quarter ending June 30, we sustained a loss".[12]

One interesting side-light on the Willys-Overland strike was the injunction issued by Judge John M. Killits. This according to The New York Times, was the first time the Clayton Anti-Trust Act was applied to a labor union.[13] The Clayton Act states that an injunction cannot be issued if the union activity is "lawful" or "peaceful". The judge interpreted the Toledo riot as "illegal", and "unpeaceful", and on this basis issued the restraining order.

Two months before the Willys strike, the union fared a little better against the Russell Auto Company of Buffalo. In this case the court decided it was perfectly legal for the union to attempt to organize the plant.[14] At its 1921 convention the Machinists Union executive committee, which was beginning to incur the wrath of the A. F. L. for its industrial organizing activities, voted to break from the parent union and become an independent. Once on the convention floor, the resignation resolution was voted down.[15] All through the nineteen twenties

[12] The New York Times, July 19, 1919.

[13] Ibid., June 8, 1919 and Sept. 25, 1919.

[14] Ibid., May 6, 1919.

[15] Ibid., June 11, 1921.

machinist union agents continued to agitate in the auto plants, but the union's power was broken in the 1919 Willys strike.

The second union to organize in the auto plants was the Auto Workers Union. This union, an industrial union, developed out of the A. F. L. carriage workers union founded in 1893. In 1911 the A. F. L. recognized the growing automobile industry, especially because many A. F. L. craftsmen were going to work as non-union men in the auto plants. In 1918 the Automobile Workers Union was ordered by the parent A. F. L. to strike the name "automobile" from its title and this the smaller union refused to do. By 1919 the union membership was 13,000 strong, mostly Detroit auto workers.[16] The union continued under the A. F. L. until 1921, when it was expelled because of its violation of A. F. L. craft principle of organizing painters, metal workers, electricians, etc.,into separate unions instead of one large union. By 1921 the Auto Workers Union had 45,000 members and thirty-five locals in Detroit, Toledo, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Flint, Pontiac, Buffalo, Chicago, and New York.[17] Seven organizers were working full time. The Detroit Local 127, was the largest local. R. Dunn states that it was the first to get the forty-eight hour week, pay increases, and better

[16]Heston William McPherson, Labor Relations in the Auto Industry, (Washington, D. C. 1940) p. 16.

[17]Ben Stolberg, The Story of the C. I. O., (New York 1938) p. 156.

conditions, although he does not say in which plants. It was described by Auto Workers Union President, W. A. Logan as the strongest single labor local in Detroit.[18] The Detroit Local had a form of organization similar to the shop-steward system so prevalent today. The Detroit auto workers were organized into shop units which were composed of committee men, elected one for every ten workers in the plant. The governing body at the local, the board of administration, was made up of the secretaries and chairmen of these units, the executive board, and the board officials. All grievances came to the shop committee men, who handled them on the spot. If the grievance could not be settled at this point the board of administration took up the case. The Auto Workers Union had committees in the following plants in Detroit; Studebaker, Hupp, Fisher Body, American Auto Trimming, Young, Cadillac, Anderson, Briggs, Hudson, Chalmers, Wilson Body, McCord, Lincoln, and Packard. The managements may have recognized these committees but the chances are that they did not, particularly Briggs. Dodge, Wadsworth, Ford, Paige, Kelsey Wheel, and Saxon had members, but no committees had been set up. [19]

In its short career, the Auto Workers Union had many

[18] Dunn, Labor And Automobiles, p. 188.

[19] Ibid., p. 188.

strikes. In April 1919, the Wadsworth strike occurred, involving some 1500 workers. The cause of the strike was the company's refusal to permit a worker's committee. The company was engaged in turning out Ford automobile bodies and used this company's workers to break the strike.[20] In the spring also of 1919, 700 workers of the Young Spring & Wire Company struck for an increase in pay, and the reinstatement of three shop girls who had been discharged. After two weeks the demands were won. Also in 1919 there were minor strikes at the Wilson Body Company, Dodge Brothers, and Studebaker.

A number of strikes also were staged in the early twenties. In November 1920, Fisher Body instituted a ten per cent cut in pay. This was followed by another decrease in February 1921 of twenty-five per cent.[21] At this point a strike was called. This strike, for all practical purposes, marked the climax of the Auto Workers Union in Detroit.[22] The country was in a state of depression and there was a surplus of labor. Fisher Body easily imported non-strikers and normal production continued. There were also strikes during this period in the paint departments at Packard and Hupp. The Auto Workers Union won both of these, but the number of workers in-

[20] Detroit Labor News, May 16, 1919 and May 23, 1919.

[21] Ibid., May 16, 1920.

[22] Ibid., Feb. 11, 1921.

volved was very small, both under a hundred.[23]

Outside of Detroit, the union had some measure of success in its stronger locals. In Grand Rapids, workers in the Hayes-Ionia Body Company struck. For fifteen weeks the company tried to break the strike by injunctive action and the use of strike breakers. In the end the 400 workers were taken back. As to their demands I could find nothing concerning losses or gains. Other strikes were staged in the Seaman Body Company in Milwaukee and Buick in Flint.[24] The most effective strike outside of Detroit in the 1919 to 1921 period was staged by the workers in about 100 body-building, painting, and repairing plants in Manhattan and Queens in New York. The Auto Workers Union local, about 1200 strong, was headed by Arthur Rohen. The demands were a forty-four hour week instead of forty-eight, and a fifteen per cent wage increase for workers receiving less than $35.00 a week, and a ten per cent wage increase for those earning $35.00 a week or over.[25] Charles E. Hawkes, Sr., President of the Auto Body Manufacturing and Applied Trades Association, said that his organization would not deal with the union, but it would deal with the workers

[23] Detroit Labor News, Feb. 11, 1921.

[24] Ibid., July 1, 1921.

[25] The New York Times, Oct. 16, 1919.

individually.[26] On April 2, 1920, Supreme Court Justice Gavegan denied an application by Locke and Company and twenty other auto body manufacturers for an injunction preventing the officers of the Auto Workers Union from interfering with their business. S. John Block, attorney for the defendants, told the court that since the strike in October 1919, the 100 employers rejected a settlement proposed by the Mediation Bureau of the New York Department of Labor. About seventy-five of the members then formed the Auto Coach Builders Association of Greater New York and accepted the union demands. These shops then operated under union contracts. The other shops gradually resumed production, without the benefit of the union.[27]

By 1922 the Auto Workers Union was for all practical purposes dead. A number of things killed it. The A. F. L. dealt the union a hard blow by expelling it for its industrial activities in 1921. The depression of 1920 and 1921 also hurt the union very greatly, because members who were unemployed or received severe pay cuts ceased to pay dues. And in addition, in a depressed market, employers would make no concessions to the employees to end a strike. The union newspaper dwindled from sixteen to eight to four pages. This paper, The Auto

[26] The New York Times, October 16, 1919.

[27] Ibid., April 3, 1920.

Workers News, was published sporadically all during the twenties by the Auto Workers Union. The price was one cent a copy and the paper was published monthly in the later twenties.

After the Auto Workers Union was expelled from the A. F. L. the communists began to infiltrate its ranks and it came rightly to be branded "Red".[28] This, especially during the "red scare" of the early twenties, was particularly harmful to the union.[29]

The next stirrings of organized labor in the auto industry were to come in 1926.

[28]A. J. Muste, The Auto Industry and Organized Labor, (Baltimore, Md. 1936) pp. 27-28.

[29]Ben Stolberg, The Story of the C. I. O., p. 156.

CHAPTER VI

ORGANIZING EFFORTS IN THE LATE TWENTIES

A. THE A. F. of L'S ATTEMPT IN 1926. The week before the A. F. of L. convention, the building trades council met in Detroit to settle jurisdictional disputes between affiliate unions. Frank Morrison, Secretary of the A. F. of L., arrived in Detroit on Friday, October 1, 1926, and conferred with Frank X Martel, President of the Detroit Federation of Labor. William Green arrived on Sunday morning, October 3, at the Michigan Central Station. That afternoon the A. F. of L. executive council held a conference. At that conference, the council drew resolutions recommending the affiliation of the Metal Trades Department with the International Federation of Metal Workers, and that all state and national government contracts calling for the use of metal workers, hire only American employees. The committee charged that there was discrimination between hiring American born and foreign born workers on government jobs. The foreign born workers would work for less money.

On Monday, October 4, 400 delegates met in the Graystone Hotel ballroom for the official opening of the convention. The meeting was opened with a summary of the past year's progress and the formulation of policies for 1927.

The A. F. of L. declined in membership in the year 1925 and 1926. The 1925 membership had been 2,877,910 while the

1926 membership was 2,813,910. This decrease was partially due to the fact that the postal railway clerks left the A. F.of L. and formed their own independent union. The executive council was the same for the two years: James Duncan, Frank Duffy, T. A. Rickert, Jacob Fischer, Matthew Woll, Martin F. Ryan, James Wilson, and James P. Noonan. The Vice-President was Daniel J. Tobin, the Secretary Frank Morrison, and after so many years with Sammuel Gompers, a new face in the president's chair, William Green.

Big questions to be put before the 1926 convention were the six-hour day,the company union, organization of the auto workers, union insurance, aid to Mexican unionists, and the recognition of Soviet Russia.

On Monday, October 4, Mayor Smith of Detroit delivered the welcoming speech to the convention. He said, "Detroit has some of the finest employers in the country, and also some of the punkest". He added, "I hope that you fellows will be able to soften them up". Smith was introduced by F. X. Martel, President of the Detroit Federation of Labor. The annual report, read the first day, described the company union as dangerous to the interests of the workers, and concluded by saying: "The American Federation of Labor will oppose to the full extent of its powers the efforts of employers to compel employees to join company unions".[1] In addition the report said the

[1] Detroit News, October 3, 1926.

"American" plan had spent its force, but could be revived. The report also referred several times to the unorganized workers, but the auto industry was not mentioned. It called for more worker education, union participation in an international union, with headquarters in Amsterdam, Holland, and the end of the use of the injunction with regards to labor unions. Concerning communists, the report stated "they have no place in a free American Trade Union". [2] Constantly stressing co-operation between employer and employee, the report concluded by saying:"The trades union is the custodian of the craft skill in industry, and the management that co-operates with the union will obtain the most intelligent production results. This fact requires co-operation to the extent of almost a partnership."[3]

At his opening speech, President Green attacked company unions and employee representation plans. He admitted that company unions jeopardized the labor movement but predicted that organized labor would triumph in the end. He said that the A. F. L. would continue in its efforts to organize the open shop plants, in the city of Detroit as well as every other American city. "The labor movement is here, it will ever

[2] Detroit News, October 3, 1926.

[3] Ibid., October 3, 1926.

remain, its destruction is inconceivable. It has proved by conflict and contest its right to be recognized as a part of the institutional life of our great land."[4]

Continuing President Green said that company unions would not, in the end, satisfy the workers. The desire was strong to form independent trade unions. A company union did not permit the worker to express his views and push for ends he wanted. All good conditions had been obtained not by company unions, but by independent trade organizations. President Green prophesied that company unions would ultimately fail. "Each employer has his own peculiar form of organization so localized in its character, so transient in its basis that it must ultimately fail . . . . He (the working man) is always controlled by those who shaped and formed the organization and conferred it upon him. The working people will not long subject themselves to such subordination of conscience because if there is any one characteristic of the working people of our land, that stands out more prominently than another, it's the determination to be independent and free economically and politically."[5]

President Green explained that the A. F. L. would welcome any action on the part of the employers toward the

[4]The New York Times, October 5, 1926.

[5]Ibid., October 5, 1926.

shorter work week and higher wages. He added, "We ask him to accept the philosophy and the theory of the A. F. of L. regarding these reforms."[6] The A. F. of L., said President Green, was equal culturally, intellectually, and socially to any other group in the country. A minority of the people feared trade unions and they were the ones who stated that the working people were contented. If this was so, asked President Green, why did the people of Detroit elect a unionist as a mayor? President Green ended on the note that men to be free politically must first be economically free.

After President Green's speech, the convention adopted a resolution to make war on company unions. "The United States cannot remain half trade union and half company union."[7]

This was the first time that the A. F. of L. took the offensive against the company union. A fund of $200,000 was to be raised to carry out the campaign. The money would be spent to educate the workers in the company unions. A tax of one cent a month for ten months would be placed on each A. F. of L. member to raise the fund.

On Wednesday, October 6, 1926, the awaited resolution to organize the auto industry was introduced by James O'Connell,

[6] The New York Times, October 5, 1926.

[7] Ibid., October 3, 1926.

President of the Metal Trades Department. "Resolved, that the officers of the A. F. of L. be hereby authorized to inaugurate a general organizing campaign in the automobile industry at the earliest possible date and that the president of the A. F. of L. call a conference of all officers of national or international organizations for the purpose of working out the details, so the question of jurisdiction may be, for the time being eliminated to the end that all employees in the auto industry may be brought into the membership of the A. F. of L."[8]

This resolution was first drawn up in the joint meetings of the Metal Trades Council and the executive council before the convention started.

By 1926 the industry was producing four and half million cars a year. The time was considered ripe for organization by the A. F. of L. At first it was thought that the Metal Trades Department of the A. F. of L. might be able to handle the job alone.[9]

Before 1926 there were a few union (A. F. of L.) men working in the auto plants. They were craftsmen, principally coremakers and machinists. These men received union wages, and the prescribed union conditions, but they had no contract with the employer.[10] Another directly opposite version of the story is

[8]Detroit News, October 6, 1926.

[9]Dunn, Labor And Automobiles, p. 176.

[10]Interview - George Dean, President of The Michigan State Federation of Labor, January 20, 1958, Lansing, Michigan.

put forth by Lewis Lorwin. He states that the machinist union, working through the Metal Trades Department wanted the A. F. of L. to take over the organizing. The machinist's union did not have the funds. The reason behind the machinist union's action, says L. Lorwin, was that this union wanted to keep the gains it had made in the automobile repair garages throughout the country. The only way these gains could be safe was to have the main plants unionized. This plan was abandoned. Funds were lacking, and at that time the Metal Trades Department was concentrating on industries where the percentage of skilled workers was higher than in the auto plants. A preliminary plan was then drawn up and placed before the 1926 convention. After a short discussion it passed. The resolution as stated above called for a meeting of all department heads for the purpose of planning an organization campaign.[11]

Back in 1925, the convention also had a similar resolution placed before it, but it differed from the first one by proposing to organize the auto workers on a purely industrial basis. This proved a bit drastic for the convention and the whole thing quietly died in committee.[12] The 1926 resolution which planned to organize initially on an industrial basis,but which later divided

[11] Lewis L. Lorwin, The American Federation of Labor, (Washington, D. C. 1933), p. 244.

[12] Ibid., p. 244.

the workers into crafts was more agreeable.

Reaction to the 1926 resolution rolled from the press. The editors spoke of the coming "battle of the Titans". The Detroit Employers Association ground out the slogan, "Detroit is Detroit because of the open shop". John Lester Dryden told the Detroit Employers Association that the real cause for Detroit's growth was the open shop. "Ninety-seven per cent of the workers in Detroit go happily about their callings, without the hindrance of trade unions", said Mr. Dryden. Members of the Detroit Employers Association at the same meeting at which Mr. Dryden spoke, took an oath to protect the open shop.[13] The citizens committee backed by the Chamber of Commerce, set up a committee of fifty businessmen to combat the A. F. L. This committee accused Mr. Green and his associates of being "un-American" and against the government. The committee further said that if the A. F. L. was permitted to organize the auto plants it would mean untold hardship for the men and "the expenditure of millions of dollars by our employees".[14]

The magnitude of the task of uniting the auto workers became apparent when President Green and members of the executive council visited the Ford plant on October 8. The labor

[13] Detroit News, October 6, 1926.

[14] Dunn, Labor and Automobiles, p. 97.

leaders watched the workers on the assembly line turning a bolt or tightening a nut. They saw the automobiles grow before their eyes. The belt never slowed or hesitated. Hindus, Negroes, Japanese, Poles, Hungarians, Slavaks, and Russians all worked side by side. Upon leaving the plant the "delegates appeared dispirited" and had very little to say. After the visit the original organizing resolution was amended to give the A. F. L. leaders more time to plan before the campaign started. The Detroit News stated that, "the Ford visit took the steam out of labor's sails".[15] About the only comment concerning the visit, by a labor leader, was made by the Secretary of the Metal Trades Department, A. J. Berres, who said, "The constant monotony of the work, and the tremendous pressure under which these men work, means that within a few years they are added to the human junk heap, and their places are taken over by new arrivals . . . . this system makes good material for the radical and the demagogue to work upon."[16]

Upon entering the plant the labor leaders all received a pamphlet, outlining Ford practices and procedure. Under the Industrial Relations Section were the words, "Shop committees, unions, or labor leaders are unnecessary because

[15]Detroit News, October 9, 1926.

[16]The New York Times, October 9, 1926.

there is nothing to argue about except in individual cases and these are settled man-to-man."[17]

After the October 9. (Saturday) session of the convention had adjourned, James O'Connell, President of the Metal Trades Department, outlined a tenative program for the conduct of the campaign to organize the auto industry. A meeting of the principal craft unions involved would be held in Washington, D. C., immediately after the convention was over. The meeting would be under the direction of the executive council. The organizing campaign was scheduled to begin in January of 1927. A nation wide publicity program lasting two years would be an important segment of the campaign. Concerning the conduct of the campaign, O'Connell said, "The executive council will do the organizing, thus getting around any jurisdictional disputes. In this campaign the union will be free of the old bugaboo jurisdiction. The worker will be free of the usual handicaps and obstruction generally involved in the business of organizing an industry through the efforts of a dozen or more distinct craft international unions."[18]

Earlier in the day, (October 9) during the session, a resolution was adopted calling for shorter hours and higher pay for workers. Green asserted that the American prosperity

[17]The New York Times, October 9, 1926.

[18]Ibid., October 10, 1926.

was based upon consumption, and higher pay and shorter hours would work to increase consumption.

On the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth of October, the convention voted against; recognition of "Red Russia," Wm. Z. Foster, company unions, the labor injunction, and employer representation plans. The convention closed on Friday October 15, with a short speech by Green calling for more co-operation on the part of labor and management.

The closing of the pulpit to Detroits' labor leaders, and the withdrawal of an invitation by the Y. M. C. A. to President Green, caused a great deal of furor in the A. F. of L. convention. Covering the matter President Green said: "it is difficult to believe that Detroit's churches would yield to such sinister influences."[19] The church and the "Y" leaders decided to ban the union leaders because of the open shop controversy centering about organizing the auto industry. Officials of the "Y" who withdrew the speaking invitation to President Green were Charles Van Dusen and Charles Beecher Warren. Concerning the churches, the A. F. of L. leaders had been speaking in the churches of the convention cities for seven years. In Atlantic City the year before sixteen pulpits were filled by A. F. of L. leaders. Detroit was the first city that refused permission. The possibility of a split in the members of the

[19]The New York Times, October 6, 1926.

Detroit Council of Churches grew eminent until the labor leader's invitation were withdrawn. Only two of the several hundred Detroit churches scheduled to have labor speakers went through with the original plans. The two churches having labor speakers were the Bethel Evangelical, whose pastor was Reinhold Niebuhr, and the First Unitarian Church, Augustus P. Recard, pastor. The speaker was Albert F. Coyle, of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers who spoke at both churches, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Many ministers favored the labor leader's speaking, but were voted down by their vestrymen. One church, the First Congregational, whose pastor was Dr. Glenn Atkins, voted to have the speakers, but Rev. Atkins turned the decision down, saying that it did not represent the true view of the vestrymen, seeing as some were absent. Rev. Niebuhr, commented that the church was open to criticism -- "sublimation of economic interests of a certain class, is just making the Protestant pulpit a class tool".[20] According to The New York Times, the reason why the churches turned down the usual privileges of letting labor leaders speak, was due to a letter sent by the Detroit Chamber of Commerce to the pastors of all Detroit churches advising them to refuse to allow the labor leaders to speak. The Chamber of Commerce branded the labor leaders as men "who are admittedly attacking our government and our

[20] The New York Times, October 7, 1926.

'American plan' of employment".[21] The letter was sent just after the convention got under way.

On October the sixth (Wednesday) President Green turned down a new invitation put forth by the Detroit Council of Churches to address a mass meeting on the Sunday afternoon of October 10. The invitation was extended by James Meyers through the courtesy of Rev. Atkins and the Council of Churches. The Detroit Chamber of Commerce was bitterly denounced on the convention floor and James P. Frey, President of the Ohio Federation of Labor, called the businessmen of Detroit "a bunch of cutthroats and slackers", who try to use the city's churches for their own selfish ends. C. C. McGill of the Detroit Chamber of Commerce later answered the convention by stating, "We are determined that Detroit shall not be in the grips of the Trade Union Leaders. Our city is the most prosperous because it is the stronghold of the union shop".[22] By the following Friday however, the controversy had almost subsided. The Rev. Worth M. Tippey, Executive Secretary of the Social Service Commission, Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, announced the completion of arrangements for eighteen labor speakers to appear in Detroit churches the following Sunday. The list of speakers

[21] The New York Times, October 7, 1926.

[22] Ibid., October 9, 1926.

included President William Green, Frank Morrisson, John Walker and Albert F. Coyle. President Green was to speak at a general meeting which was to be held at Detroit's First Congregational Church at 1:00 P. M. on Sunday, October 10. This meeting was interdenominational and was to be held under the auspices of the Detroit Council of Churches. The labor leaders were not to discuss issues such as the closed shop, but the "social and spiritual aims of the labor movement".[23] One of the speakers was to be Rev. John McDowell, a labor pastor, who started working in the West Virginia coal mines at the age of fourteen. The theme of the sermon in all of the churches was the relationship of the goals of the union and the goals of the church. President Green said: "The whole tendency of the human race has been toward organization and co-operation. The churches with their teachings of brother-hood have helped very greatly".[24] The ministers in Detroit also joined with labor in a rebuke of the Detroit businessmen for the affront made to the churches, when the Detroit Board of Commerce sought to intimidate pastors, to persuade them not to permit labor leaders to speak in the churches. Dr. Atkins said the church was independent from outside influence, and declared further the right of labor to

[23] The New York Times, October 9, 1926.

[24] Ibid., October 11, 1926.

organize and bargain collectively. Other ministers also assailed the Board of Commerce, and linked labor's aims with those of the church.

On October 14, the Citizens Committee of Detroit sent a letter to the final session of the A. F. L. convention. The letter denied that the committee representing forty-five business organizations was attempting to control the church and labor in the city. They were merely attempting to save Detroit's laborers from control such as had been evidenced by organizing methods in other cities. "Before the conclusion of your convention", the letter went on, "it is sincerely hoped that you will answer the questions; What can the Federation do for Detroit workmen".[25]

The letter was circulated on the convention floor, but nothing more was done with it. In addition to the church trouble, the Detroit Y. M. C. A. also withdrew an invitation to President Green to speak. The invitation was withdrawn after the union resolution concerning the closed shop, company union, and the organizing of the auto workers. According to the Detroit "Y" President, Van Dusen said; "Mr. Green is a Christian gentlemen, but it would be inexpedient for him to address the "Y" members at the present time".[26]

[25] The New York Times, October 15, 1926.

[26] Detroit News, October 7, 1926.

Van Dusen said further that the invitation had been sent before the open shop resolutions were passed. The "Y" was in the process of conducting a building fund campaign. The Fisher Body Corporation had recently contributed $500,000, and Ford gave $1,500,000.

Both the Detroit Free Press, and the Detroit News editorialized about the A. F. L. convention. Both said in effect that the A. F. L. was a very fine organization, and it had done a great deal for a great many workers in some parts of the country, and in some industries. But, both also said that the American Plan was what had made Detroit great. To destroy the American Plan would be doing an injustice to the City of Detroit and all the workers in it. The editorials stated that in Detroit, management and labor act together harmonously, and a union would just disturb the arrangement; therefore the A. F. L. and its organizers should go somewhere else where they were needed, but they should not stay in Detroit.[27]

When the smoke of the convention cleared the seventeen A. F. L. unions involved in the auto organizing campaign (claiming jurisdiction over the auto workers) held a conference to set a line of action. This meeting was held on December 21,

[27]Detroit Free Press, October 4, and 5, 1926.

1926. It decided to waive temporarily all the jurisdictional claims of the different internationals concerning the auto workers. Many of the large internationals balked at the plan, but it was instituted after much debate. President Green also intimated that some of the manufacturers were in a receptive mood, and would possibly consider letting their plants be organized, if they were safeguarded against jurisdictional disputes.

A second meeting of the executive council alone was held in Washington, D. C., on January 11, 1927. After deliberating on the problem of the auto workers and their organization, the council directed William Green to call a conference of all labor leaders having jurisdiction over employees in the auto plants to decide on the organizational steps. After the meeting President Green at his press conference said, "These trades probably would consider organizing in the various large auto plants, waiving jurisdiction temporarily to permit greater expansion among employees of such plants. Some labor leaders are known to favor a policy of building up independent organizations of employees within the large auto plants to be absorbed later by regular labor groups."[28]

When another conference was held on March 24, 1927, only nine instead of seventeen unions were represented:

[28]The New York Times, January 18, 1927.

machinists, molders, draftsmen, plumbers, pattern makers, upholsters, painters operating engineers, and electrical workers.[29] A plan submitted by President Green was adopted with a few minor modifications. It provided for the waiving of jurisdiction by the various internationals concerned. The A. F. L. was to direct the campaign. The international unions were to furnish the organizers and the funds. Workers were to be formed into organizations directly affiliated with the A. F. L. The Federation also pledged to bring about the transfer of those who were organized into the different internationals eventually. Organizers in the campaign were to stress the inter-dependent interests of labor and management, the duties and obligations of both sides, with regard to collective agreements, and the need, not only for regulating wages and hours, but also for improving work standards and stablizing employment. It was also agreed that where the workers had already been organized by their craft, they were not to be disturbed.[30]

Another part of this line of attack consisted of letters to the leaders of the auto industry, with a view to induce them to enter an understanding that would help the plant to be organized.[31]

[29]Lorwin, American Federation of Labor, p. 246.

[30]Ibid., p. 247.

[31]Dunn, Labor And Automobiles, p. 176.

The employers, when they bothered to answer the letters, said they and their employees were very contented with the existing situation and no union was necessary.[32]

On June 27, 1927, another conference convened to decide upon immediate steps. An A. F. of L. organizer was appointed head of the organizing campaign, with five others to work with him. Work would start in Detroit. Premature strikes were to be avoided since there was no money for strike benefits. The organizers were instructed to impress upon the employers the union's concern for the welfare of the industry. The conditions of employment at this time were bad, many workers were out because of the model change at Ford. The organizers thought that their only chance was a conference with Ford. Proposals were put forth, they failed.[33]

Not only were the employers adamant, but the local international union heads wanted very little to do with organising the auto plants. They were doing "all right" for themselves. The did not relish the idea of stirring themselves, and undertaking the spade work of organizing a "bunch of ignorant hill billies."[34] By 1928, the whole organizing campaign

[32]Raymond Walsh, C. I. O. Industrial Unionism in Action, (New York 1937) p. 97.

[33]Lorwin, American Federation of Labor, p. 248.

[34]Harris, "Revolt of the Robots," Current History, April 1938, p. 50.

had been abandoned.

B. MINOR STRIKES IN THE LATE TWENTIES. Starting in 1926, the machinists union set out to organize the auto industry by working through the garages and auto repair mechanics. When this campaign was started, the employers used a lockout to kill the union. In order to be allowed to work, an employee was compelled to sign a Yellow Dog contract. In the Chicago area the workers refused, and the lockout turned into a strike. On July 8, 1927, the employees of sixty per cent of the 1500 gasoline stations in the Chicago area struck. In addition to the recognition issue there was also a wage dispute. The station attendants, whose salary was $140.00 a month, wanted a seven to ten dollar increase. The oil truck drivers wanted a $15.00 increase over their going rate of $175.00 a month.[35] The strike ended two days later in a compromise. The filling station attendants and oil truck drivers each received about half of their original demand. As for the recognition of the machinists union, the whole campaign quietly died. The filling station and garage employees were still unorganized.

There were a few more strikes of any consequence in the auto industry before 1933. One event took place in

[35] The New York Times, July 9, 1927.

Oshawa, Ontario, at the General Motors plant on March 27, 1928. Three hundred trimmers walked out of the body plant protesting a wage cut of forty per cent, the third such cut in six months. The manager of the plant said that the workers would not be dealt with collectively, but individually. He further added that the company was having no difficulty in bringing in strikebreakers. The strike ended three days later, the workers accepting a partial cut but not the full forty per cent.[36] The workers in the plant did have a very weak union which was affiliated with the Canadian branch of the A. F. L. After the strike the affiliation was severed, and a new one established with the All Canadian Trade Union Congress, a more militant organization.[37] Two more strikes in the auto industry of any consequence during the years from 1926 to 1930 were the Flint Oil Sanders strike, and the Oakland California Fisher Body Strike.

The Flint Oil sanders struck Fisher Body because of bad working conditions and a pay cut. A non-union shop committee presented the following demand to the management:

1. A pay raise of $.25 an hour.
2. Better grinding compound.

[36]The New York Times, March 31, 1928.

[37]Ibid., November 3, 1928.

3. Hot water for washing.

4. No victimization.

At a meeting with the management, the workers were urged to try to earn their old wage, at the new reduced hourly rate. This the workers refused to do. The strike continued with mass-meetings and picketing. The stike began to spread to other parts of the Fisher Plant until also a thousand workers were involved. To combat this the company offered a minimum wage of a dollar an hour to all non-strikers. This move not only stopped the spreading of the strike, but broke it. Workers returned to their benches, the oil sanders were fired permanently, men were brought in to fill their places and normal operation resumed.[38]

On June 5, 1929, 250 men led the Oakland,California, Fisher Body Strike. Their demands were;

1. Eight hour day.
2. A six dollar day minimum.
3. Time and a half for all overtime.
4. Recognition of the auto workers union.
5. Equal pay for children and women doing the same job as the men.
6. One hour lunch period.

[38] Auto Workers News, August 1928.

7. Better working conditions.

8. Paid vacation.

A month later the strike was broken by bringing in strike breakers under police protection.[39]

During this period of the late twenties there were very few minor strikes in the Packard Plant, Hudson Motor Company, Fisher No. 18 and 21, Pontiac, Seaman Body Company, Briggs, Kalamazoo Limousine Body Company, and the Grand Rapids Body Company. Most of these were failures on the part of the workers.[40] These strikes were non-union and spontaneously called. In all these strikes the Auto Workers News merely announced that on a certain day so many workers went on strike in a particular plant in protest for low wages or bad conditions, etc. In subsequent issues the strike is not mentioned again.

[39] Auto Workers News, June 1929.

[40] Ibid., February 1927
July 1927
August 1927
October 1927
July 1929
October 1929
December 1928
March 1929

There was very little or no organizing activity in the auto plants until 1933, when the A. F. of L. again made another attempt. It is interesting to note however, that all through the twenties there were small pockets of union men in the auto plants. These men were for the most part skilled tradesmen, such as toolmakers, moulders,pattern-makers, or machinists. They worked for union wages, but not under a contract. They were not recognized as union men by the management.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY

This thesis has served to reaffirm the doctrine that there were few labor unions in the auto plants during the decade of the nineteen twenties. At no time during the twenties except for a brief period directly after World War I, and the depression of 1921, were the unions in any of the auto plants. The Ford Motor Car Company, the largest of the auto makers, was without a labor union throughout this entire period.

The Auto Workers Union which was first made up of carriage and wagon workers, organized some plants on a very small scale in the period between World War I and the depression of 1921. The union had numerous small strikes in Dodge Brothers, Timken, Willys-Overland and others. The Fisher Body strike which occurred in early 1921, marked the climax of the union's career. From this time on the union declined in membership, until the middle twenties it was for all practical purposes non-existent. The union was also gradually taken over by the communists, and its tabloid the Auto Workers News became merely a carrier of the communist party line. The machinist union during the twenties, also made a feeble effort to organize the auto workers which came to nothing.

In 1926 the A. F. L. set out to organize the auto plants but after a series of conferences and letters sent to the employers, the whole campaign quietly died.

The conditions in the plants themselves during the twenties, were for the most part good when compared with those of other industries during the same period. The pay was not as low or the hours as long as in many others. Due to this fact unions were kept out. The workers however, had grievances, the main one being the lack of security, but they were not voiced, at least in public. Also to counter organization the employers either used spies, Yellow Dog contracts, outright physical coercion, or conversely they openly wooed the workers by sponsoring picnics, bands, glee clubs, and baseball teams. Many of the employers doubtlessly had good intentions when they staged a company picnic or banquet, but regardless of intentions the effect was to keep out the unions.

If, during the nineteen twenties there had been labor unions in the auto plants, the later labor leaders of the nineteen thirties might have been less militant and violent.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

There has been one major study on labor relations in the auto plants during this period, that being Robert F. Dunn's book, Labor And Automobiles, which was published in 1929, by International Publishers. This book is extremely critical of the auto makers, and the A. F. of L., while at the same time glorifying the left-wing Auto Workers Union. Labor And Automobiles proved most helpful for its description of the organizing activities in the auto plants immediately after World War I, and during the early twenties by the Auto Workers Union.

The major source used concerning labor relations in the Ford Plant was the new book by Allan Nevins, entitled Ford, Expansion and Challenge 1915 to 1933, published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1957. This source gave a good account of the five-dollar day, the Sociology Department, and the company's labor policies under Sorensen and later Harry Bennett. A good description of the Ford factory methods and conditions was found in E. P. Norwood's, Ford Men and Methods, published by Doubleday in 1931. While these two sources tend to glorify Ford and his policies, he is soundly debunked by Keith Sward in his book, The Legend Of Henry Ford, published by Rhinehart in 1948. Mr. Sward gives a very critical account of the five-dollar day, and Ford's labor policies during the twenties. There was almost no material concerning the working conditions and wages of

Buick or Oldsmobile or any of the other auto plants besides Ford, about which there was a great deal. The Ford materials either tended to glorify him very highly or oritize him very sharply. Henry Hamilton a biographer of Ford, and Samuel Crowther tend to make Ford into an industrial statesman, while Keith Sward in The Legend Of Henry Ford, and Upton Sinclair in The Flivver King, published by Upton Sinclair in 1937, protray him as somewhat of a scoundrel.

Ben Stolberg in The Story Of The C. I. O., Viking Press, 1938: Raymond J. Walsh in C. I. O. Industrial Unionism In Action, Norton, 1937: and Lewis L. Lorwin in The American Federation Of Labor, Brookings Institute, 1933, all deal very briefly and critically with the A. F. of L's attempt to organize the auto industry in 1926.

Concerning wages and hours in the auto plants during the twenties a very useful study was published in 1925 by the Bureau Of Labor Statistics, entitled Wages and Hours of Labor in the Motor Vehicle Industry 1925.

Turning to newspapers, the Detroit Labor News carried a fairly complete and objective account of the organizing activities of the Auto Workers Union and the Machinists Union in the early twenties. This paper was published by the Detroit Federation of Labor (A. F. of L.). Another newspaper, a tabloid used was the Auto Workers News. The only issues available are those from May 1927 to May 1930. Also a few months

are available during the early nineteen thirties. The Auto Workers News, published monthly was usually four pages long. The single copy price was one cent, but the yearly subscription price was fifty cents. From reading the Auto Workers News one is lead to believe that the Auto Workers Union was a communist front organization, and that the Auto Workers News merely reiterated the party line. The Detroit daily newspapers had almost nothing to say about the union activities in the auto plants during the twenties, with one exception, the organizing campaign of the A. F. of L. in 1926. The Detroit News carried a daily front page column on the happenings of the A. F. of L. convention which included the auto organization plans. The auto organizing campaign plans were played down by the News but they were mentioned.

Concerning periodicals, S. M. Levin in the Personnel Journal, October and August 1927, does a fairly objective job of analyzing the Ford profit-sharing program. Reinhold Niebuhr very critically analyzes the plan in two articles appearing in Christian Century for December 1926 and June 1927. The tactics of the managers and the efforts to organize in the twenties, as a background for later developments in the thirties are set forth by Herbert Harris in an article entitled "Revolt of the Robots" which appeared in the April 1938 issue of Current History.

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