



LOOKING BACK *Moving Forward*

Michigan Labor History Society

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LABOR in MICHIGAN

Learning from the Past & Moving Toward the Future



THEN & NOW:

Left, women at the Goody Nut Shop in Detroit occupy their store during a wave of sit-down strikes in 1937.

Today, hundreds of young Detroiters are demanding a higher minimum wage, demonstrating in front of fast-food restaurants and on downtown streets, and for a sustainable future with Green Union jobs.



By STEVIE BLANCHARD

For more than a century, Michigan workers have built movements to improve their lives. From mass protests demanding an eight-hour workday, to strikes by streetcar drivers, copper miners, furniture workers, and others, the labor movement inspired and energized generations of working

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Labor in Michigan

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people. And then, in 1937, a tidal wave of sit-down strikes washed across Michigan, as workers stood up to corporate dominance with a new, powerful tactic. The results showed the determination of workers: the sit-down strike at General Motors in Flint took 44 days — starting just after Christmas 1936, not ending until Feb. 11, 1937, with a victory for the United Auto Workers.

That was the start of a monumental year. There was hardly a day in 1937 without some form of worker action. So much so that local newspapers kept a front-page tally of places on strike.

Now, more than eighty years later, it is important not only to look back, but to move forward, always asking how do we learn from the autoworker, the lumberjack, the dime-store sales clerk, the cigar-roller, the hotel and restaurant worker — all among the groups that went on strike back then — and build power for workers today?

The Michigan Labor History Society (MLHS) is committed to examining these events and looking at the lessons they provide for today's challenges. There is no question that labor is in a watershed moment.

Our opponents have been empowered, particularly after the 2016 election. But one thing hasn't changed, and probably never will: the only way that



Photo: Jim Westphoto.com

Hotel workers, government employees, home-care workers, and others have been among the thousands of Michigan workers who have demonstrated in recent months.

unions, and the workers they represent, will survive is when those workers take a stand for themselves.

Business unionism is behind us. The service model, in which workers view their union as something that they pay dues to in order to receive services, as they would an insurance company, is dying in front of us.

We've learned that the one sure thing that will build unions and create better working conditions for American men and women is activism. What those early strikers and today's workers share is the desire for change. Labor can continue to harness these emotions into collective action.

Today, you cannot open an Internet browser or watch a TV without hearing about the many losers in our economy, from students to retirees to immigrants and far too many more to list. Workers have become wage slaves. Union membership numbers have declined since the 1950s. But there is a silver lining. Like the workers in 1937, there is a widespread desire for change among workers. People are tired of losing, then being told, "that's how it goes, chum." We face strong, powerful and unprincipled opposition. But we have all the resources we need to win: the workers.

Workers can return to our roots, to remember that unions are about worker power and voice. They are learning about power: how it is generated and how it is used. The sit-down strikes were very effective — so much so that they are now illegal. But there are other tactics and strategies out there that workers are discovering and using. As an earlier union publication put it: "We Make Our Own History."

Recently, we've seen young activists striking and marching for a higher minimum wage, joining with community groups to save families from evictions, marching for women's rights, organizing and striking against cutbacks in education.

Looking back at earlier decades we can see what victory looks like and how to get there through collective action. Going forward, those events remind us of a basic truth: organized labor is only as strong as the members are engaged and active. The heroes of the past should be our role models. We need to fight to be more inclusive and support all workers. If so, we could see another year like those in the 1930s that inspire us. We're certainly due.

This publication focuses on 10 key labor events that took place in Michigan during the 19th and 20th centuries. Stories were contributed by members of the MLHS program committee and in some cases appeared earlier in the MLHS journal, "Looking Back, Moving Forward," in the UAW publication, "We Make Our Own History," or in the program for "Forgotten: The Murder at the Ford Rouge Plant," a jazz opera about the 1930s by Steve Jones and produced three times in Michigan between 2004 and 2010.

In the centerfold, you will find a map of labor history sites in Michigan with annotated information on each site. You can use the map and information to create your own road trip to these sites, where you can learn more about Michigan's labor history. Additional copies of this publication are available from the Michigan Labor History Society, 5401 Cass Ave., Detroit MI 48202. You can also view the map and guide at our website: mlhs.wayne.edu

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Labor History Briefs

Mobilizing for Labor Day 2019

The annual Labor Day Mobilization Luncheon sponsored by the Michigan Labor History Society will be held on Tuesday, August 20, at UAW Region 1-A, 9650 S. Telegraph Rd., Taylor, Michigan.

Tickets are \$40 and include a tasty luncheon, a special program, and a one-year membership in the Society. For information and reservations, please call the MLHS office at 313-577-4003.

Finnish-Americans in Michigan's Workforce

Thousands of immigrants from Europe, Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East came to Detroit during the 20th century to seek jobs in the growing auto industry. Among them were many settlers from Finland, some of whom went to work in the copper mines of the Upper Peninsula, while others moved into the Detroit neighborhood around Woodrow Wilson and Davison Streets. From September 19-23, many of the descendants of these Finnish immigrants will come to metro Detroit for the annual FinnFest, a gathering that features panels, lectures, and field trips. The Michigan Labor History Society has been asked to provide a labor history bus tour for participants.

In addition to the usual tour of labor history sites, we will visit the old Finn Hall on 14th Street in Detroit, which later became the headquarters of UAW Local 157.



Guided bus and walking tours that focus on labor history are growing in popularity among visitors to metro Detroit. The Michigan Labor History Society has scheduled tour guides for several groups recently, including students from the University

of Richmond, Virginia; AFL-CIO labor lawyers attending a national conference; attendees at the North American Labor History Conference at Wayne State University; students at the WSU Labor School; union members who work at Central Michigan University; FinnFest USA, and others.

MLHS offers groups a two-hour bus tour through metro Detroit or a one-hour walking tour along Woodward Avenue from Grand Circus Park to the riverfront. Guide services are free, but groups are asked to provide a bus with a public-address system. For reservations, contact the MLHS at 5401 Cass Ave., Detroit, Michigan 48202, or call 313-577-4003.

For visitors to the Upper Peninsula, the National Park Service provides free ranger walks from the Keweenaw National Historic Park visitors' center in Calumet. The walks take visitors to sites connected with the 1913 copper miners' strike and the tragedy at the Italian Hall.

Three Conferences Focus On Michigan History

The Michigan Labor History Society is one of the sponsors of the "Michigan in Perspective: The Local History Conference" taking place March 22-23, 2019 at the Sterling Conference Center in Sterling Heights. The conference, which features speakers, panels, and workshops on a variety of Michigan history topics, is one of three held annually by the Lansing-based Historical Society of Michigan.

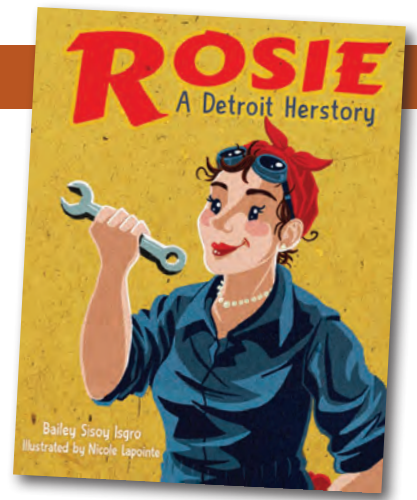
An Upper Peninsula History Conference will be held June 28-30 in Escanaba, and the Historical Society of Michigan's annual meeting and history conference is planned for Ludington Sept. 27-29.

Information, schedules, and registrations are available from the Historical Society of Michigan, 5816 Executive Drive, Lansing, Michigan 48911, or online at hsmichigan.org.

'Rosie the Riveter:' A Herstory for Children

Author Bailey Sisoy Igro has written a children's book about women who worked in war production plants during World War II in southeast Michigan.

"Rosie: A Detroit Herstory" tells the story of women symbolized by the character "Rosie the Riveter" who built tanks, aircraft, and ammunition at factories that



built automobiles and were retooled for the war effort. More than 60,000 Michigan women of all ages and races participated in the war production, filling the jobs of men who had been drafted into the armed forces.

The 48-page book is geared to readers aged six to 12 and was published last year by Wayne State University Press. The list price is \$16.99 and the book is available from WSU Press, at many bookstores, and online.



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Fighting for the Eight-Hour Day

“There must be something fearfully wrong,” wrote a “workingman’s wife” in a letter to the editor in the *Detroit Evening News* March 24, 1886, when a few Detroiters “can accumulate millions in so few years, during which time the workingman has become a serf.”

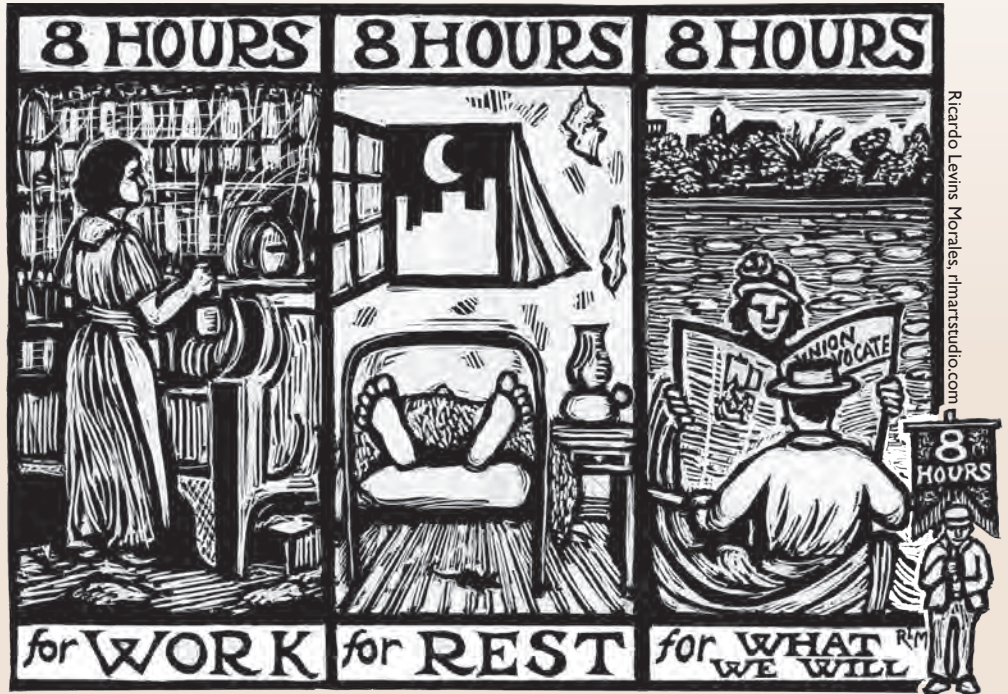
Like a 19th Century version of the “we are the 99 percent” slogan of the 21st Century Occupy movement, the letter-writer was clearly upset with the inequality between those who owned the city’s industries and those who toiled in them. In the weeks after the letter was published, that issue took hold among thousands of Michigan workers who struck for shorter hours and higher pay.

Unions in many parts of the U.S. had long been campaigning for shorter hours. In 1884 in Chicago unions passed a resolution declaring that as of May 1, 1886, the eight-hour day should become the legal workplace standard. The eight-hour movement quickly spread across the country.

Unions in Michigan joined the effort and began making plans for May 1. “This, The Fearful Day” was the headline in the *Detroit Evening News* on that date. “Looked For With Anxiety by Employers and Employed,” it continued.

Some Detroit workers had already made partial advances. Stove workers had gotten 10-percent raises, shipyards had agreed to an eight-hour day after a strike, six breweries had set eight-hour days, and carpenters and joiners had won a one-year contract to reduce the workday to nine hours at 10 hours pay. Painters, bakers, and school janitors were joining the campaign. Months earlier, in the Saginaw area, lumber mill workers had gone on strike to reduce their workday to 10 hours, under the slogan “10 Hours or No Sawdust.”

May 1 was a half-day at many Detroit factories because it was a Saturday. At the Michigan Car Works, workers who built railroad cars, showed up only to find that the company had laid off 125 workers. On Monday, they learned that the company had fired Knights of Labor organizer P.J. Clair. These two actions led even the *Evening News* to complain that



Ricardo Levins Morales, rlmartstudio.com

the company had shown a “lack of spirit and conciliation” in dealing with workers.

Organizer Clair went from department to department to tell workers of his firing, picking up support and ending at the plant manager’s office where a growing crowd demanded Clair’s reinstatement, shorter hours, and a pay raise.

When management said no, 1,500 workers struck and went to the Car Works foundry and spring works, with a demand to lower the workday from 10 to nine hours with no cut in pay. The next day, May 4, a crowd of 3,000 assembled for a solidarity rally.

Within the week, over 5,100 workers in Detroit were on strike, including 3,400 from Michigan Car, Peninsular Car, and three other rail-car companies.

Although the newspapers had predicted that workers would be forced to return to work because their families were hurting, a benefit dance raised \$900 for relief and the strikes continued. On one day alone, the *Evening News* published a “box score” showing 3,780 workers on strike — among them workers at Pullman’s rail-car factory, sewer laborers, the Diamond Match factory, cracker bakers, and more.

On May 5, three thousand workers gathered at Michigan and Trumbull, the

site that would later become Tiger Stadium, for a rally. A leader of the cigar workers union, George Vonberger, warned, “When the workingmen become intelligent they would turn the rich man out of the palaces and live there themselves.”

At some of the targeted companies, management locked out workers; at others they tried to break the strikes — in one case, management at a screen and pail factory hired 12- and 13-year-old boys as replacements for striking workers.

The strike at the Michigan Car Works failed after three weeks as workers returned to their jobs. But their decision to challenge management for as long as they did generated a new spirit among Detroit’s workers. Over a four-month period, an estimated 9,000 Detroit-area workers had either gone on strike for shorter hours or had negotiated shorter hours with their employers.

On Labor Day, Monday, September 6, not a legal holiday, spirits were so high among workers that thousands defied their employers by leaving their jobs to join a three-mile long parade from Grand Circus Park to a park on Jefferson Ave., where they heard speeches and picnicked with their families. An estimated 10,000 people

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Public Transportation Then and Now: The Great Streetcar Strike of 1891

By JOHN RUMMEL

A new streetcar route, the Qline on Woodward Avenue, has come to Detroit. A look back at the groundbreaking trolley strike of 1891 reveals how public transportation, or the lack of it, has shaped the history of the city.

Just as today, Detroiters in the last decade of the 19th century needed public transportation to work and move about the city. But disgust with the Detroit City Railway Company, the private streetcar monopoly that ran the trolley system, was so great it inspired a united rebellion from a wide cross-section of the city's working class and all who relied on the system.

According to the book "Working Detroit" by historian Steve Babson, male trolley workers averaged only 18 cents an hour for a 12-hour work day while women workers suffered the indignity and discrimination of only being paid nine cents. Worse still, to cover both the morning and evening rush hours, workers were often forced to stay at the job site for 18 hours — but those six additional hours were unpaid.

Riders too had their gripes. Fares of five cents for each ride were exceedingly high. While other cities had modernized to electric trolleys, the company continued to use horse-drawn carriages. Riders endured the foul smell of straw, horse manure, and fumes from gas fired heaters.

Streetcar workers formed an Employees Association and began to fight back by pushing for a 10-hour day. The firing of 12 organizers in April of 1891 was the catalyst that provoked the strike.

City police broke up picket lines and escorted strikebreakers into the car barns. However, as the company had alienated both its workers and customers, sympathy for the strikers was widespread and quickly grew. By the second day of the strike, huge crowds gathered at



An early horse-drawn streetcar and a group of Detroit streetcar workers near the end of the 19th century. Below, the Qline light-rail streetcar that opened in Detroit in 2016.



The greatest threat to social peace was the greed and callousness of private corporations, not unions.

— Attributed to Mayor Pingree

intersections to block trolleys driven by strikebreakers. A cheering crowd of 5,000 men, women and children rolled a streetcar into the Detroit River.

Thousands of Detroit workers from shoe, radiator, and stove factories abandoned their jobs to show solidarity with the strikers. Ironworkers leaving their shift ripped up tracks in front of their shop. Even downtown businesses donated to

the strike fund.

By Friday, the fourth day of the strike, the trades council made plans for a mass rally on Saturday to unite all the workers who had gone out.

Company officials pleaded with Mayor Hazen Pingree to call in the state militia. Pingree, who had long railed against the high fares and poor service of the private trolley company, refused and the company capitulated to the strikers' demands. The mayor became known as a "friend of the workingman."

It was quite a conversion for this former successful shoe manufacturer but who, as Babson writes, had come to

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Streetcar photos: Walter P. Reuther Library

Qline photo: flickr.com/photos/heathermi



Eight-Hour Day

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participated with floats and banners—in effect, a one-day general strike.

It would take several decades before the eight-hour day became a universal standard. While five-day, 40-hour weeks took hold in some industries (at Ford Motor Co. in 1926, for example), it wasn't until the Fair Labor Standards Act was introduced by the New Deal in 1937 that a 40-hour week with overtime pay above that became the law of the land in many industries.

Yet, even then there were workers not covered by the law (see the story, page 13 about the Woolworth's workers who worked 54-hour weeks). It would take organizing and bargaining by many different unions before a standard 40-hour week became widely implemented.

— UAW retiree Dianne Feeley and Dr. Thomas Klug of Marygrove College researched material for this story for the *Southwest Detroit Auto Heritage Guide*, a website under development.



Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark photo: Shawn D. Ellis

Streetcar Strike

Continued from page 5

believe “the greatest threat to social peace was the greed and callousness of private corporations, not unions.”

The 12 organizers were rehired and their union recognized as the bargaining agent. Fares were lowered to 3 cents and electric cars were phased in over the next several years.

Pingree championed the public ownership of the trolleys as the only way to improve service but it took until 1922 to win complete public control. In 1897 he was elected the Republican governor and championed public ownership of utilities, higher taxes for big business and regulation of private capital. As former Vice President Joe Biden enjoys saying, the current crop of Republicans are “not your father's Republican Party.”



Photo: Barbara Ingalls

Hazen Pingree looks over Woodward Ave. from Grand Circus Park in Detroit. Thousands of Detroiters made donations to help build this statue of the “Idol of the People.”

— For further information, see *Working Detroit* by Steve Babson (Wayne State University Press, pages 14-15)

Changes Coming to Hart Plaza?

Detroit's riverfront Hart Plaza may see some design changes in coming years, according to a story in the *Detroit Free Press*. City planners have informally discussed ways to better connect downtown Detroit to the Detroit River, the paper reports. As changes are made, several works of public art, including the Labor Legacy Landmark “Transcending” and the Underground Railroad Monument, “must be treated respectfully,” the paper declares.

The Labor Legacy Landmark, to which hundreds of workers, unions, and others contributed over \$1.6 million for construction costs, was dedicated over 15 years ago as a gift to the city on the 300th anniversary of the arrival of French explorers. A project of the Michigan Labor History Society, the Landmark is visited by thousands of people every year who come to learn about labor's past, its present, and its vision for the future.

Support the Michigan Labor Legacy Landmark

Add your name or the name of a friend or family member to the wall of honor at “Transcending,” Michigan's Labor Legacy Landmark at Hart Plaza on the Detroit riverfront. Already, hundreds of people have had their names engraved on the wall of honor at the site. The names are permanently inscribed on a stainless steel plaque as a special tribute to the men and women who built Detroit and its labor movement.

A donation of \$100 or more will reserve a place for the name you choose. Please fill out this coupon and mail it with your contribution to the Michigan Labor History Society, 5401 Cass Ave., Detroit MI 48202. Contributions are tax deductible.

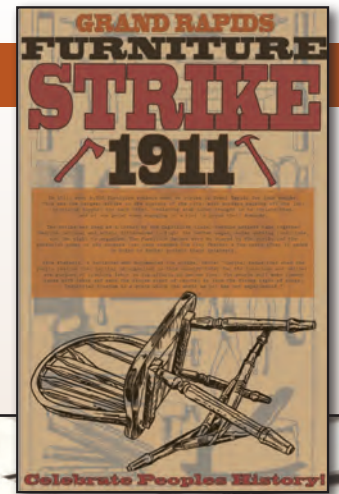
Here is my tax-deductible donation of \$100 or more to the Michigan Labor History Society. Please inscribe the following name (Limit to 24 characters including spaces):

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

E-mail _____ Telephone _____



The Grand Rapids Carpenters' Strike When Furniture Workers Put Down Their Tools

After the American Civil War, as the nation's economy became increasingly industrial, German, Dutch, Polish, and other European immigrants flocked to the Midwest. A river city and railroad center with an abundant supply of hardwood forests nearby, Grand Rapids was a prime location for the furniture industry.

By the 1890s, Grand Rapids was the furniture-manufacturing capital of the U.S. One-third of its 90,000 residents were new Americans, most of whom toiled in the woodworking factories. The workweek consisted of six 10-hour days, workers earning as little as \$2 a day.

Within the 85 factories, problems augmented by religious and cultural differences caused divisions between skilled and unskilled workers, and between immigrants and the native-born.

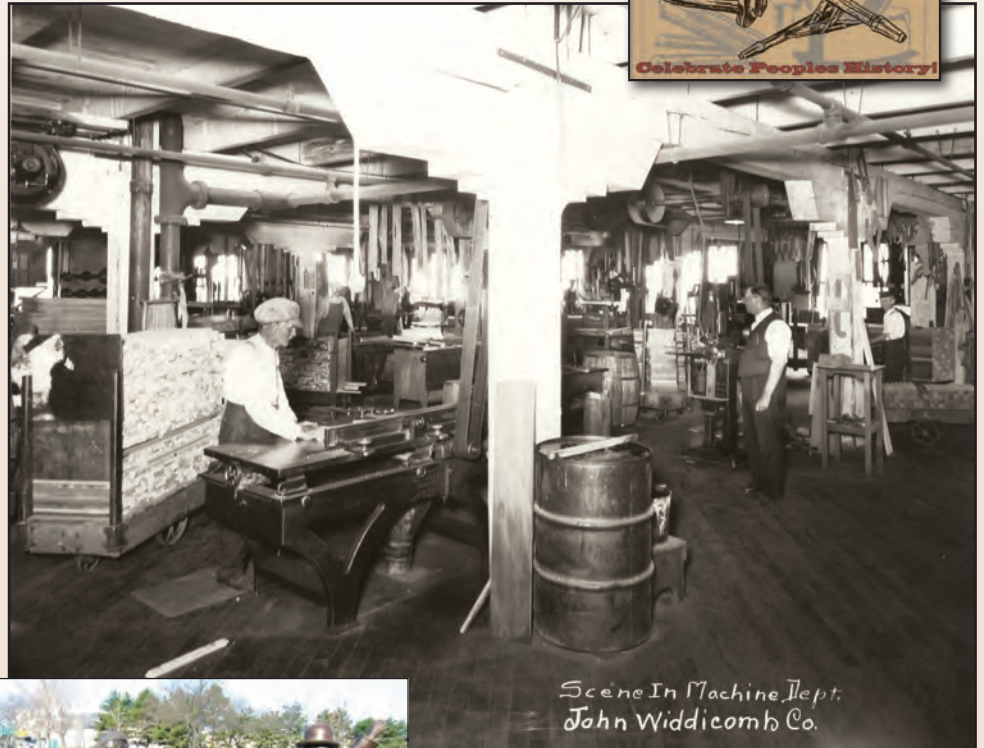
The divisions were sharpened when a nationwide industrial slump began in 1905. With furniture workers getting only minimal raises or none at all, the time was ripe for collective action. Instead, the various factions in the 7,000-person workforce turned inward.

Although a workers' benevolent Association had been formed as early as 1886, several attempts to organize the city's furniture factories had failed. The unionization effort was stymied in part by workers who

were content with the status quo, many of whom had mortgages and did not want to upset the industrialists who controlled local banks. In addition, language barriers and traditional Old World bigotry caused distrust, most notably between Roman Catholics and conservative Dutch Christian Reformed Church members.

But with so many of the furniture workers unhappy with their working conditions, a unification effort began in 1910 when a 26-year veteran was fired for leading a small committee of employees seeking a raise.

According to labor historian Michael Johnston, even the most conservative



Above, carpenters at work in the John Widdicomb Co. furniture factory in Grand Rapids.

Left, workers came from many countries to work in the shops in Grand Rapids, the "Furniture capital of the U.S." A monument carved and cast by Roberto Chenlo commemorating their 1911 strike stands in downtown Grand Rapids. The project was the work of the Labor Heritage Society of West Michigan.

Top inset: A poster pays tribute to 1911 Grand Rapids furniture strike.

workers were ready to strike. And on April 19, 1911, 4,000 furniture workers took off their shop aprons and walked away from the job. They asked for a nine-hour workday at 10 hours of pay, the discontinuation of piecework practices, and an end to the firing and blacklisting of union advocates.

The furniture company owners were not pleased with the challenge to their authority, and refused to talk with the workers or their United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners representatives. Leaders of the Grand Rapids Furniture Manufacturer's Association pressured

banks to foreclose on striking workers' mortgages. They targeted leaders for retribution, and exploited the well-known divisions among the workers.

As the strike went into a second month, many strikers had to depend on the good will of their churches and neighbors. Tensions among workers ran high, Johnston said. "But they forged an extraordinary solidarity."

Their bond was both challenged and strengthened when strikebreakers arrived in Grand Rapids. Mindful of the potential for a public relations disaster, the carpenters union went to great lengths to curb

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Furniture Strike

Continued from page 7

outbreaks of violence. Although strikers' wives may have thrown stones at strikebreakers crossing picket lines, in an era when labor strife often resulted in gun battles, not one life was lost during the four-month strike.

To the dismay of the industrial establishment, much of Grand Rapids rallied in support of the workers, including the mayor and the Roman Catholic archbishop.

"Although getting a union contract was not an official striker demand," Johnston said, "both sides knew that unionizing the city's largest industry was the real issue."

After a long, hot summer of hunger and want, however, the workers began to weaken in their resolve as the factories remained operational with a workforce of strikebreakers. "Then the Christian Reformed Church issued an edict that union membership was incompatible with church membership," Johnston said. Facing expulsion, many of the church's members returned to work. The edict broke the four-month stalemate.

Though the strike failed in many respects, some of the employers did grant wage increases, and the job action is credited with creating a ripple effect in other communities. The strike was a "critical cornerstone of the labor movement in western Michigan," Johnston told the *Grand Rapids Press*. These workers put aside their differences to "forge something far greater. That's the universal idea of the labor movement."

In that same spirit of solidarity, unions came together to honor the valiant furniture workers. A small group of volunteers formed the Labor Heritage Society of West Michigan as a vehicle to educate the community and to raise \$1.25 million to construct a monument honoring the strikers. Culminating a more than 10-year effort, hundreds of union members, retirees, and elected officials dedicated the monument on April 19, 2007, the 96th anniversary of the start of the strike.

"The strike action helped make Grand Rapids a better place," retired UAW President Owen Bieber said at the ceremony. The monument, he added, "will act as a living tribute to the universal struggle of workers, to find courage to unite and stand for what is fundamentally right. It will also live as a reminder that nothing comes without a price. That hardship turns to resolve. That defeated spirits rise to become victorious souls. That struggle becomes the toil of love."

— *This story originally appeared as a labor history feature in the American Postal Worker magazine in July 2007*



Calumet's Italian Hall The Copper Country Tragedy that Left 73 Persons Dead



U.S. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs division



Photo: National Park Service

Left: Copper County miners. Scores of deaths and injuries were reported every year in these mines.

Above: Monument to honor the miners and those killed in the fire at Calumet's Italian Hall on Christmas Eve, 1913. Seventy-three people suffocated on the staircase leading to the second floor, where a holiday party for children of strikers was taking place.

By DAVID ELSILA

For hundreds of families in Michigan's Copper Country in the northwest Upper Peninsula Christmas 1913 was a time of tragedy, not of joy. Instead of celebrating, families mourned. Black ribbons replaced Christmas trees and wreaths. Horse-drawn funeral hearses moved slowly down the streets of Calumet that in other years might have seen Santa Claus waving from a reindeer-drawn sleigh.

The tragedy occurred on Christmas Eve at Calumet's Italian Hall during a party for the children of copper miners who had been on strike against the Calumet and Hecla Mining Corporation (C&H as it was known locally) for

nearly five months. The region was the location of the richest lode of native copper in North America, and people had come from many countries to work in the mines. There were Italians, Cornish, Finns, Croats, and others. Union literature and union organizers used many languages to build worker solidarity across these ethnic lines.

Miners worked six days a week, ten hours a day, in the deep, poorly-lit mine shafts. Dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries were recorded each year: in the year before the strike there had been at least 47 deaths and 643 serious injuries. For several years, two-man teams were used to drill into mine walls where explosives were placed to dis-

Photo: Michigan Tech Archives



Photos: Walter P. Reuther Library



Top: Families bury the dead after a three-mile march to Lake View Cemetery.

During the five-month-long strike noted union leader Mother Jones, right, paraded with strikers. Other women rallied the townspeople, including Anna ("Big Annie") Clemenc, above right, who was later inducted into Labor's International Hall of Fame.

lodge copper ore, but now mine owners were seeking to replace them with one-man drills, nicknamed "widow makers" because no one would be around to summon help in case of an accident.

When the miners union, the Western Federation of Miners, asked to meet with management to discuss mine safety and other issues, they met a stone wall. The president of the Boston-based C&H, James MacNaughton, rejected any request to negotiate. "Grass will grow in the streets before C&H recognizes the union," he told a local newspaper. "The union must be killed at all cost."

Miners responded by walking out at several sites. For months, they picketed, rallied, and paraded. The legendary union organizer Mother Jones joined a parade down Calumet's Fifth Street, and women — most notably Anna "Big Annie" Clement — mobilized to support the miners.

As the strike extended into the cold winter months, the Western Federation of Miners organized a Christmas Eve party, complete with gifts, candy, music, and an appearance by Santa Claus. In



A Personal Story

My Uncle Ted Taipalus was one person who survived the Italian Hall tragedy. His father had been a striking miner, and he and his two brothers and three sisters had gone to the Christmas Eve party along with other strikers' children.

When someone yelled "fire," he and his brothers escaped on a ladder from a second-story window. But two of his three sisters, Ellen, 7, and Mildred, 5, were both caught in the staircase crush and died.

The loss of the two young girls hurt his father terribly, Ted said. "He took me in his arms and cried like a baby. I had never seen my dad cry before." After the strike ended, Ted said, a mine boss came to his father and asked him to return to work. But so devastated was he from the loss of his daughters, he would never go back into the mines again.

Despite the family tragedy, Ted, at the age of 16, was hired as a "puffer boy" in Hecla No. 9 mine at \$2.25 a day where he operated the engine that hoisted timbers used as roof supports in a stope, the space left after ore has been extracted.

Ted left the mines in 1929 and moved to Detroit, where he worked for many years in customs enforcement on the U.S.-Canada border, making trips back to Calumet from time

to time. In 1955, he went with friends to the Eagles Hall in Calumet, then climbed upstairs to where a dance was in progress. It was the same hall that forty-two years earlier had been the Italian Hall, a place that he once vowed he would never return to. When he discovered where he was, "I just wanted to get away from there," he wrote. He never returned.

— D.E.

the midst of the celebration, someone opened the door to the second-story hall and yelled "fire," spreading panic, and scores of people headed for the exit, jamming the narrow staircase that led to the street. Seventy-three people, 58 of them children, perished, their bodies jammed against each other, unable to breathe. There was no fire, and for the past century suspicion has reigned that the false cry of alarm came from an agent of the mine owners who had become increasingly frustrated by the strikers' resolve.

The miners, after burying their dead, continued their strike, which lasted for five months. During the strike, C&H officials threatened some miners' families with evictions from their company-owned homes. They brought in strikebreakers, and Michigan authorities sent in thousands of National Guard troops. Management did not budge from its hard line, and after five months on strike, most miners returned to work. Eventually they would gain some wage

increases and shorter workweeks. But it wouldn't be until thirty years later that the company finally recognized the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers Union as the workers' representative.

For many years, townspeople and visitors have made a Christmas Eve pilgrimage to the site of the Italian Hall in the 400 block of Seventh Street in Calumet. The brick arch that framed the fatal staircase, surrounded by a landscaped historical park, is all that remains of the hall, which was demolished in the 1980s. The site is part of the Keweenaw National Historical Park maintained by the U.S. National Park Service.

On December 24, 2018, the Calumet community dedicated a new monument at the site of the tragedy. It includes the names of all 73 victims. The National Park Service maintains a visitors center at 98 Fifth Street in Calumet that includes several exhibits and schedules ranger walks.



The Ford Hunger March: Five Martyrs for Justice

By JIM PITA

In the dark days of the Great Depression, unemployment in Detroit was nearly 50 percent, even higher among black workers. Families that couldn't pay their rent or mortgages were losing their homes and facing eviction. A local physician reported that there were up to four deaths a day in which malnutrition played a role.

The grim conditions led many workers to form Unemployed Councils to press for relief. Homeless workers slept in downtown Detroit's Grand Circus Park where, as organizer Joe Billups recalled, people spoke at all hours raising the issue of unemployment insurance. "Work or bread" was the slogan," he said.

On March 6, 1932, a racially mixed crowd of workers filled a hall on Detroit's Woodward Ave. to hear organizer and Communist Party leader William Z. Foster call for a demonstration. The next day, March 7, three thousand workers set out from several locations to converge at Fort and Oakwood Streets on Detroit's far-west side. Their intention was to continue to the Ford River Rouge plant in Dearborn, where the number of jobs had dropped from 128,000 to 37,000 between 1929 and 1932, even as Henry Ford was maintaining that there was plenty of work for anyone who wanted a job. The event became known as the Ford Hunger March.

Metro Detroit was in the midst of a cold snap as the marchers took off, some of them even being waved off by Detroit Mayor Frank Murphy as they left downtown Detroit. When they reached the Fort Street Bridge at Fort and Oakwood, march leaders provided instructions — be loud but be peaceful — as the marchers prepared to walk to the employment office at the Ford Rouge plant.

At about 1:30 p.m., the marchers crossed the bridge and moved north along Miller Road. The objective was to accompany a team of activists who intended to deliver a list of demands to Henry Ford.

A contingent of Detroit police officers was deployed to assure order was maintained within Detroit city limits. The police peeled off as the march



Above, jobless workers and their supporters rally before marching to the Ford Rouge Plant on March 6, 1932.

Right, demonstrators scatter after being attacked by Ford security guards. Five men died as a result.

Top, a poster announces a public meeting to investigate the attack on the Ford Hunger March.



reached the Dearborn city limits. A line of Dearborn police blocked Miller Road and ordered the marchers to turn back. They did not, and crossed into Dearborn, pushing the police line back. The police responded with tear gas, but the wind blew the gas back into their ranks. Firefighters positioned on the pedestrian overpass at the Ford plant sprayed the approaching marchers with high-pressure hoses.

The event then took a tragic turn. Ford security agents opened gunfire on the crowd. Four men died of their wounds that day; a fifth died three months later. Dozens were wounded.

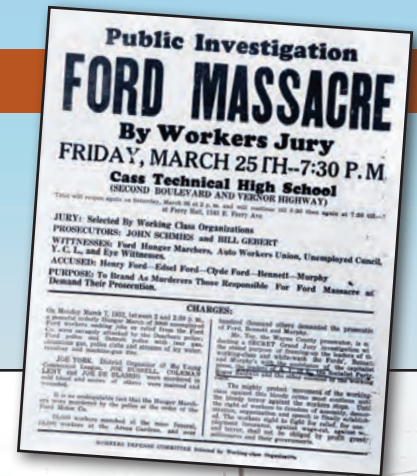
The victims ranged in age from 17 to 37. They were: **Joe York**, 20, a leader in the Young Communist League; **Joe DeBlasio**, 31, an Italian-American immigrant active with the Detroit Unemployed Councils; **Joe Bussell**, 17, a high-school student and Young Communist League member; **Kalman Leny**, 27, unemployed; and **Curtis Williams**, 37, an unemployed autoworker and Communist Party member.

All but Williams were buried in Wood-

mere Cemetery in Detroit in the shadow of the Ford Rouge plant. Williams, an African American who died three months later, was denied burial in the cemetery because he was black. His comrades then said they would bury him in Detroit's Grand Circus Park, but police stopped them as they were digging up concrete for a grave. Instead, they planned to cremate him and scatter his ashes from an airplane over the Rouge plant.

Some fifty years later, a team of labor activists found the victims' gravesites, marked only by small brass markers in an overgrown part of the cemetery. They persuaded UAW Local 600's retiree chapter to pay for headstones for the four, as well as for a fifth honoring Curtis Williams.

Today, one can visit Woodmere Cemetery and find the graves in block 18 of the Fernwood section. At Fort and Denmark Streets, near the Fort Street Bridge, work is underway to build a neighborhood park that will have a memorial to the Hunger Marchers, a few yards away from where they gathered on that chilly day in 1932.



Photos: Walter P. Reuther Library

The Great Flint Sit-Down Strike

Standing Up By Sitting Down

On December 30, 1936, two days before the New Year rang in, workers in Flint learned that General Motors planned to move key dies from its massive Fisher Body complex in order to thwart an anticipated strike by the United Auto Workers.

For months, workers had been meeting secretly at private homes and elsewhere out of sight of GM management to organize their union. When they heard about the company's plan to move dies, leaders decided in a quick strategy session to occupy Fisher Body Plant No. 1, catching the company off guard and beginning a sit-down strike that would last for 44 days and change the face of the U.S. labor movement.

Quickly the strike spread to Fisher Body Plant No. 2, and sit-down fever spread to hundreds of workers. One of the workers memorialized the day in a song sung inside and outside the struck plant:

*These 4,000 Union Boys
Oh they sure made lots of noise.
They decided then and there to
shut down tight.
In the office they got snooty,
So we started picket duty,
Now the Fisher Body shop is on strike.*

Workers gave GM a list of demands, including a 30-hour work week to help share jobs with the unemployed, recognition of the UAW and a national contract, minimum pay rates and an end to the speedup of the assembly line, and seniority rights.

The sit-down strike proved effective. Within days, over 100,000 GM workers throughout the U.S. and Canada were on strike, either walking picket lines outside or sitting down inside — in Detroit and cities in Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Ontario, Canada. Inside the Flint plants, workers took turns doing guard duty, cleanups, and machine maintenance. Musical instruments materialized. Education classes alternated with calisthenics.

GM sought court injunctions against the strikers. It turned off the heat in the plants. The company-backed Flint Alliance harassed strikers' families, and



Top, crowds gather outside GMs' Fisher I plant in Flint, while sit-down strikers occupy the inside. Left, musicians help keep up the strikers' spirits. Above, after 44 days, the strike ends.

opponents of the strike tried to block food shipments to the sit-downers. Police attacked strike supporters with tear gas and billy clubs. But workers in other plants in the Flint GM complex joined the strike, and an active Women's Emergency Brigade led by Genora Johnson Dollinger kept the police at bay and public spirit alive. Forty-four days later, on Feb. 11, 1937, the company gave in. GM, one of America's largest companies, had agreed to recognize the UAW and negotiate a contract. The working people in Flint — and throughout North America — had triumphed.

Barely stopping to celebrate, UAW workers at the Chrysler Corp. sat down on March 8 in eight Detroit plants, including the legendary Dodge Main, joined later by workers in Marysville, Michigan, and in Los Angeles and New Castle, Indiana. They continued their occupation until

March 25 and their strike until April 6, when the company agreed to recognize the union and negotiate a contract. Even before Flint, workers at the Kelsey-Hayes parts plant in Detroit had had their own sit-in, and there were sit-down strikes in other cities as well. Now, emboldened by the successes in Flint, Detroit, and elsewhere, the sit-downs soon spread to hotels, department stores, cigar factories, and other businesses. That spring, more than 100,000 workers rallied to support them in Detroit's Cadillac Square.

Labor historians credit the sit-down strikes in Flint and elsewhere as the birth of a powerful industrial-union movement. Until the mid-1930s, most unions were organized along strict craft lines — electricians in one, carpenters in another, toolmakers in still another. The unions emerging in the auto, steel, rubber, and other industries organized everyone, regardless of the kind of work they did, into one big union, thus gaining the

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Photos: Walter P. Reuther Library



Lansing's Labor Holiday

A 1937 General Strike for Worker Rights



Photo of Lansing Labor Holiday plaque: Maureen Sheahan



Thousands of Lansing-area workers shut down the city in a general strike on June 7, 1937.

At Lansing City Hall plaza, a memorial plaque to the Lansing Labor Holiday was unveiled in 2017 on the 80th anniversary of the general strike.

The labor history of 1930s Michigan is often told from the geographic perspective of Detroit, or of Flint with its iconic sit-down strike, which ended on February 11, 1937.

The story of the one-day general strike in Lansing, Michigan's capital city, is often overlooked; but now having observed its 80th anniversary in June 2017, the Lansing Labor Holiday has begun to get the attention it deserves, in part through the establishment of a state historical marker commemorating the event.

Lansing's REO Motors plant [named for auto pioneer Ransom E. Olds, developer of the Oldsmobile] experienced a month-long sit-down strike during March and April 1937 just as United Auto Workers Local 182 was being established as an amalgamated union for workers in the auto shops in the Lansing area. Lester Washburn, one of the original organizers of the UAW international union, worked at REO and led this effort. Local 182 became the union for workers at REO, Oldsmobile, Fisher Body, and a number

of other companies.

A few weeks after the successful sit-down strike, the new union came to the aid of workers in a small shop, Capital City Wrecking Company. When these workers sought to join the union and then elected officers, the company proceeded to fire all of them and refused to negotiate. Several weeks of futile attempts to get a contract and reinstate the fired workers resulted in a strike. As fellow unionists mobilized on the picket line, the company obtained a court injunction against the picketing, but Washburn and his fellow unionists ignored the injunction and kept up the pressure on the picket line.

At 2 a.m. on June 7, 1937, Lansing Sheriff Allan MacDonald cut the phone lines and then knocked on the door of the Washburn home armed with warrants for the arrest of Lester Washburn, who was not at home, and his wife. The sheriff took Mrs. Washburn to jail, leaving three children unattended, while his deputies dispersed throughout the city to round up seven other picketers. When Washburn

returned home from Detroit at around 2:30 a.m., and discovered what had happened, he called his union representatives to meet him in the union hall as soon as possible.

They decided to call a labor holiday—otherwise known as a general strike—and shut the city down in protest to these strong-arm tactics by the authorities. By the start of the workday, between 2,000 and 5,000 union members and sympathizers poured into the downtown streets, forcing the closing of many shops, factories, theaters, and businesses of all kinds.

Armed with clubs, sticks, and two-by-fours, workers paraded down the streets of the city singing labor songs, while Washburn and other union representatives successfully negotiated the release of those imprisoned. By nightfall, the holiday was over and before long, workers had negotiated a contract with Capital City Wrecking Company management.

The Lansing Labor Holiday was a rare instance of a mass, spontaneous demonstration by the working class in the city of Lansing to address a perceived injustice standing in the way of the momentum of union organizing in the late 1930s.

The general strike tactic had been used in only a few cases in the United States (most notably Seattle in 1919, San Francisco in 1936, and in many major U.S. cities in 1877). In the case of the Lansing workers, they did not advocate an overthrow of the system, as was the case in many of the historic conflagrations of this kind in Europe; rather, the workers were forcefully demanding that the new industrial relations pattern, ushered in by the passage of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935, work for them. The peaceful and successful Lansing Labor Holiday gave voice to the desires of this generation of newly empowered workers.

The new historical marker at City Hall Plaza in downtown Lansing recognizes the importance of the Lansing Labor Holiday as a one-day peaceful citywide strike action that galvanized the local labor community. The marker stands in sight of both city hall and the state capitol, serving as a reminder of the day that

Continued on back cover



The Women of Woolworth's Nickeled-and-Dimed No More



Photos: Walter P. Reuther Library

More than a hundred women at the downtown Detroit Woolworth's store occupied their workplace for six days to demand higher pay and shorter hours.

raise (a stunning 40-percent increase over the prevailing 25 cents per hour), an eight-hour workday plus time-and-a-half after 48 hours in a week, seniority, and no retaliation were on the list.

Management demurred, and the strikers settled in, rolling out sleeping bags in the aisles, setting up a strike kitchen for food, and playing phonograph records for dancing and entertainment, bolstering the strikers' morale.

These brave sit-downers — there were over a hundred of them, some as young as 16 — occupied the property of one of the largest companies in the country. There were workers outside looking for a job, any job. But the sit-down strategy pretty much precluded management from hiring strikebreakers (unless they tried to forcibly eject the sit-downers, which could have provoked public outrage).

Just as in Flint with the autoworkers, the dime-store occupiers knew union activity was protected by the nascent National Labor Relations Act, but trespassing and occupying private property was very much illegal. No matter. The story spread and help poured in. Food, donations, and messages of solidarity came to the store.

The strikers kept the store's three phones busy, calling supporters, family, and the press. Like any other group of young women, they kept up with girlfriends, and boyfriends, did their hair and makeup every day for the media attention, played cards, and generally had a good time.

Management refused to negotiate, hoping to outlast the women. After just a few days, the union pulled a second store offline, striking a nearby Woolworth's at Woodward and West Grand Boulevard in Detroit and threatening a national strike and boycott.

Watching developments from his office in the Woolworth Building in New York, Frank W. Woolworth got worried. Would the strike spread to other cities? Orders came down, and on the following Wednesday, Detroit Woolworth's management

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By JIM PEDERSEN

Do you think the odds are stacked against workers, and they have to settle for less and less? Is it time to throw in the towel as big corporations flex their power and workers seem to have only a small chance of winning a strike or a contract? Think again, and consider this lesson from Michigan labor history.

In the depths of the Great Depression, against the biggest retailer in the country, Detroit low-wage women workers stood up for justice, getting a union, gaining a contract, and winning raises. Their victory over the F.W. Woolworth company followed the huge win at General Motors plants in nearby Flint by just a few days, using the same new-fangled strike weapon as the Flint autoworkers did: the sit-down strike.

Woolworth's Five and Dime was the low-end retailer of its day, carrying thousands of cheap everyday items at stores throughout the country. Its owner, Frank W. Woolworth once said, "We must have cheap help or we cannot sell cheap goods." The four-story Detroit store at

1253 Woodward Avenue was typical, mostly staffed by young women, mostly selling inexpensive household items like health and beauty products, pins and needles, kitchen stock, all marked with nickel and dime price tags. A lunch counter offered a quick bite or a dessert to the predominantly white shoppers with a few pennies left over from shopping.

On Saturday, February 27, 1937 at 11 a.m. an organizer from the Waiters and Waitresses union strode to the middle of the main floor, blew a whistle and hollered "Strike, Strike," which set off an uproar of shouts and scurrying throughout the store, alerting workers on the floor to fold their arms and walk out into the aisles.

Customers were escorted out and the doors were locked behind them, while big, hand-lettered signs were posted in the windows announcing the strike and reading, "All We Want Is a Living Wage."

The strike committee and management went to a conference room where the demands of the strikers were given to the managers: union recognition, a 10-cent



Photos: Walter P. Reuther Library

Above, women joined men in passing out union leaflets to workers outside the Ford Rouge plant in Dearborn, before company thugs began beating them, left. On the overpass to the plant, below left, Ford security personnel approach Walter Reuther and other organizers before punching and kicking them, resulting in serious injuries and one death.



Ford Takes on the Union: The Battle of the Overpass

The year 1937 was a turning point in the effort by Michigan's autoworkers to organize unions. By April of that year, successful sit-down strikes had led to agreements with General Motors and Chrysler to recognize the United Auto Workers and to negotiate contracts. But workers at the Ford Motor Co.

would have to wait. Henry Ford remained strongly opposed to unions, and his 2,000-strong Ford Service Department kept close watch on workers at the Ford Rouge plant, roughing up or firing anyone they deemed sympathetic to unions. Workers were watched and followed in their neighborhoods as well as in the plant. Harry Bennett, an ex-prizefighter who ran the Service Department, had built connections with the FBI, local police, and organized crime figures.

His network sought to collect information on the 90,000 plant workers and he had the authority to hire, fire, demote, or

transfer just about anyone on the payroll. Workers who talked with each other on the assembly line were suspect, and had to use the "Ford whisper" — talking from the sides of their mouths — to communicate with each other.

Nevertheless, the newly energized UAW kept up its efforts. On May 26, 1937, union organizers planned a mass distribution of leaflets to workers outside the gates to the Ford Rouge plant during the 2 p.m. shift change. Although UAW organizer (and later president) Walter Reuther had obtained a permit for leafleting, many worried that violence would break out. So, the UAW brought volunteers from the union's Women's Auxiliary to help distribute the leaflets, believing (wrongly, as it turned out) that Bennett's force wouldn't rough up women. The union had also invited local clergy, staff members of a Senate Committee on Civil Liberties, and reporters to witness the distribution.

As the women arrived at the Schaefer Road side of the Rouge complex, Ford Servicemen met them, pushing, shoving, and punching, forcing them back on to the streetcars they'd arrived on, while beating several of the men who accompanied them. Meanwhile, reporters and photographers described being accosted by men in sunglasses who had emerged from 25 parked cars nearby and who told the reporters to leave.

On the other side of the Rouge plant, facing Miller Road, Reuther, Richard Frankenstein, and other union organizers walked up the stairs of the overpass that connected the plant with streetcar tracks and a parking lot on the other side of Miller Road. As they stood, with

'I Saw Days I Didn't Have a Loaf of Bread'

My husband was a Ford worker, first at Highland Park, then at the Rouge. In 1932, when Ford's plant was built in Ypsilanti, he was sent there. He had been making \$6 a day, but when we got to Ypsilanti, the unskilled workers were cut to \$2.80 a day. They said the Chamber of Commerce said Ford couldn't come to Ypsilanti and pay \$6 a day because the small shops there could not compete with him. Ypsilanti had a paper mill, a stove works, a small foundry. Maybe more I don't know about.

We had two children, and I saw days I didn't have the price of a loaf of bread. An old black man had a little store near us and he would trust me until payday. We found a "decent" little house for \$10 a month. I can't remember how long he worked for \$2.80, but they would get a 40-cent-a-day raise now and then. By the time my twins were born in April, 1934, he was getting \$4.40 a day.

We had a 1928 Chevy. At \$6 a day we thought we could buy a new Ford, so in the summer before we went to Ypsilanti, we bought one, traded in our old car, of course. Then when they cut us to \$2.80 a day, we just took the Ford back to the dealer and told him we could not pay for it. So we lost all of it. The dealer gave us an old Ford for \$100, to pay \$10 a month. Even that was a struggle. And I can't remember when his pay did get back to \$6.

My husband used to tell me about the Ford Service Department men sneaking around. He used to say when we get the union we'll put a uniform on them, and we will know them. I am now 88 years old."

— Carrie Smith in "We Make Our Own History" (UAW, 1986)

the Ford Motor Co. sign in the background, Ford Servicemen approached them and started to brutally beat them. Reuther was beaten and kicked down the stairs. Frankenstein was held down while being kicked in the groin and body repeatedly. Organizer Robert Kanter was beaten and pushed off the overpass, falling over 20 feet. J. J. Kennedy was hospitalized and died four months later as a result of his wounds. Another organizer, Richard Merriweather, suffered a broken back.

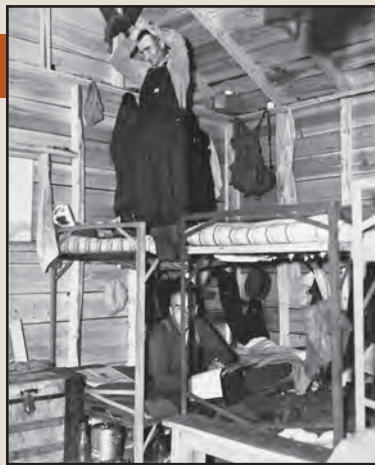
Women who had come to the Miller Rd. side were also pushed, knocked down, kicked and roughed up. "When we arrived at Gate 4, we could see Brothers Reuther and Frankenstein being severely beaten," said Catherine 'Bebe' Gelles, head of UAW Local 174's Women's Auxiliary. When she tried to pull the Ford Service Department men off one UAW man, "the three turned to me, knocking me to the ground, and kicking me in the stomach, and then pushing me to the streetcar."

During all this, Dearborn police stood by and did nothing, even when the Ford Servicemen turned their attention to the reporters and photographers. They attacked, taking their film and ripping up their notebooks. But they didn't succeed in suppressing the story. Photos and reports ran in newspapers and magazines nationwide. Once the public saw the pictures, Ford was no longer innocent, and companies across the U.S. encountered workers demanding union elections. The general public no longer accepted company pleas of innocence.

The organizers returned to the Miller Road overpass many times during the ensuing years, even as Henry Ford pursued his goal of preventing a union at Ford. Harry Bennett and his Service Department continued to intimidate the workers. But the "Battle of the Overpass" had signaled that change was coming. Workers would stand their ground, using legal as well as direct action to pursue their desire for a union.

Finally, following a strike in 1941, Ford agreed to a union election, and a majority of workers voted for the UAW-CIO. Ford workers joined the workers at GM and Chrysler to benefit from a union contract.

— MLHS Program Committee



Lumberjacks lived in crowded quarters without water to wash.

Forests Grew Silent When the Lumberjacks Struck

Life for lumberjacks in the north woods of Michigan's Upper Peninsula in the 1930s was no bed of roses.

Instead, it was likely a bed of hay and straw mattress ticks wrapped in gunny sacks and spread over two-man bunks in the cabins where they lived while cutting trees for ten hours a day at 27 to 33 cents an hour.

"There was no place to wash," said lumber union organizer Matt Savola. Men would go without baths for two or three months, bathing only when they were able to go to town. They would save up their underwear and socks for a couple of weeks, and then boil them in an iron pot to get rid of lice.

"A terrible stench comes from the haywire strung around the woodstove where the men would hang their socks to dry," Savola said in an interview with Debra Bernhardt for her report on the lumber strikes that swept over the U.P. in 1937. An estimated 6,000 men participated in the strikes over sixteen weeks.

It wasn't easy to organize a union among lumberjacks, given their tradition of individualism, the isolation of the logging camps, and the hold that employers had over them as they worked and boarded on company property. But the squalid conditions, low pay, and long hours ignited a reaction, and on May 11, 1937, half the crew at Bonifas Camp No. 2 near Marenisco, a small town in the far western U.P., walked out. Workers held a mass rally called by Lumber and Sawmill Workers Local 2530. They set demands of a wage increase to 55 cents an hour, a 40-hour week, single rather than two-man

Striking lumberjacks read the bulletin board outside union headquarters in Marenisco, Michigan.



Photos: Minnesota Historical Society

bunks, shower baths, union recognition, and a grievance procedure.

The walkout soon spread from Marenisco to other nearby lumber camps in Gogebic County. Matt Savola, a charismatic 29-year-old Finnish-American and Communist, rallied the strikers, and, using experience gained while preventing evictions in Iron River, organized relief committees to supply food and housing to the growing number of strikers.

Energized by their success in shutting down several camps, a truckload of strikers drove 200 miles one night to the Cleveland Cliffs lumber camp near Munising. Walking in before dawn, the strikers woke up the Munising lumberjacks and got a spirited response. "From there until daylight I had to sign up these guys into the union," said organizer George Rahkonen.

"By daylight the camp was empty. All of them had gone on strike." It seemed that woodsmen, hearing of the successful union campaigns among industrial workers in Flint, Detroit, and elsewhere, and learning of the new National Labor Relations Act that guaranteed the right to collective bargaining, wanted their own "New Deal."

Lumbering in the U.P. was often subcontracted to local jobbers who ran the camps, supplying timber to companies that manufactured household goods, furniture, and "woodies" — the wood-sided vehicles made by Ford and other auto firms. Ford had a sub-assembly plant in Kingsford near Iron Mountain and ran sawmills in Sidnaw, Pequaming, and Alberta, where the company built a model village of workers' homes. Although Ford

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MICHIGAN LABOR HISTORY SOCIETY

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The Michigan Labor History Society's Annual Meeting will take place Tuesday, May 22, at 6 p.m. at UAW Local 22, 4300 Michigan Ave., Detroit.

Please join us for a program on the efforts of Michigan public workers to guarantee their rights in the workplace. Food, beverages, free parking, and free admission.

Lumberjacks

Continued from page 15

security forces ejected strikers from the Alberta sawmill, lumberjacks struck six other nearby camps in Baraga County.

As the strikes spread to camps throughout the U.P., groups of vigilantes, aided by police, targeted the strikers.

In Munising, police padlocked the union hall and strikers were driven out of town. In Newberry, 60 miles east, a mob attacked an unarmed group of strikers, killing Joe Kist, last seen "rising to his knees only to be pounded to the ground" by a club-wielding foreman, according to a National Labor Relations Board report. No arrests were made and none of management's agents were ever disciplined.

Six weeks after Kist died in Newberry, some camp managers began to bargain. Four jobbers in Baraga County signed contracts on July 10, recognizing the union, setting a 40-cent hourly minimum wage, and promising single bunks, washrooms, and grievance arbitration. By the beginning of August, 38 jobbers had settled with the union, covering 400 to 500 workers. Eventually 77 jobbers, all of them small operations, would sign contracts. Meanwhile, the Michigan Dept. of Labor sent a mediator to work out an agreement between the union and the larger contractors, but while the union accepted the settlement, major operators turned it down.

On August 29, the strikers voted to end the walkouts. While the big operators had failed to sign, the union felt it had made important gains. Not only had they signed 77 contracts, but operators throughout the U.P. had been forced

into paying higher wages, cleaning up camps, establishing an eight-hour day, and improving food. "You bet things are better since the strike," a Munising lumberjack said. "And best of all, they treat us with some respect."

— *This story is based on the scholarly essay We Were Different: The Michigan Timber Workers' Strike of 1937 by Debra E. Bernhardt. This daughter of Michigan, who grew up in Iron River, wrote her report while a master's-degree student at Wayne State University. She later became the first director of New York University's Tamiment Library and the Robert F. Wagner Archives, one of the country's largest collections of labor and progressive archives. She died in 2001. An annual award is named in her honor by the New York Labor History Association.*

Flint Sit-Down Strike

Continued from page 11

designation "industrial union." The UAW and other unions like the Steelworkers and Rubber Workers formed the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a new federation challenging the craft structure of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Starting in Flint, American labor was put on a new course.

— *Adapted from "Standing Up by Sitting Down" from We Make Our Own History (UAW, 1986), edited by David Elsil*

Lansing Labor Holiday

Continued from page 12

helped usher in a period where workers could use and consolidate their new rights to organize and bargain under the legal protection of the nation.

— *Lansing Labor Holiday Commemoration Committee*



Photo: Walter P. Reuther Library

Ending their sit-down, women hoist a "We Won" sign.

Woolworth's Women

Continued from page 13

was back at the table, and a contract was announced just ahead of a deadline of Friday, March 5. Good thing, because the women had worked out a plan for Friday night dates — a special "love booth" for five-minute visits with sweethearts. But with the end of the strike, they were able to celebrate with real dates, instead.

The Woolworth's women won a five-cent-an-hour raise, a 48-hour workweek (down from 54 hours), with time-and-a-half pay for overtime, free laundering of uniforms, and a closed shop so that all workers became part of the union.

These brave workers inspired others, as retail workers in cities across America won union recognition and respect.

They should inspire us today, to take on powerful political and economic forces, knowing that with courage, determination, and solidarity we can win. And we can have some fun while we fight!