

THE STORY OF

The Searchlight

Official Publication of Chevrolet Local No. 659 — UAW - CIO
Membership 11,118

Flint, Michigan, January 20, 1944

Yuh Mean, 'Tough Cool

Crimes of Big Business

We Had To Be To Work Here

Important Notice
Buy War Bonds from your local union

Go to Church
By Andrew Michelson

A New Discovery
Workers are human

Special Notice
The men in the armed forces are clamoring for the "Searchlights."

Something Smells
Why should President Roosevelt wait until production is being cut all over the country to call for a workers' draft law?

Why Just Look at the Pages of the Past...
Barometer that registers my peoples feelings, lately they feel sick, so for you, the gladstones, I register danger.

Wounded in Action
The action taken by the rank-and-file laborer...

After Look
Johnson... 48, more than... Harhor, the... west coast, only... it had been de... riting. Commis... ran bureau of... the sinking due... At a hearing... Committee on... steel had been... Carnegie, Ill... dary of the... Co., whose of... berified the test... er the Truman... ed 28,000 tons... late, V. S. Steel... whom... This... by a federal... hrough in May... ffect four indi... as scenegone... Carnegie, Ill... if their murder... a-time profits... Wre and Ca... Marlon, Ind... by the govern... lered Dec. 21... zully last week... sell the govern... communication... although its of... use of such wire... of the Mill... shown to have... gths to develo... the govern... lenator Kilgore... batteries on all... if-aircraft gun... led, aimed and... his name cable... a defective ca... gainst aircraft...

Go to Church
By Andrew Michelson
The recent launching of the...

A New Discovery
Workers are human
By Ted L. Duke
Along with the announced in-vention of jet propulsion of air-planes by an English citizen...

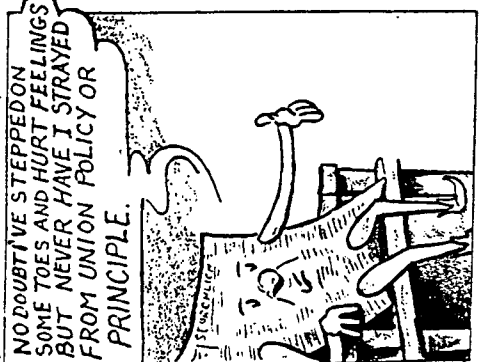
Special Notice
The men in the armed forces are clamoring for the "Searchlights." Also various local throughout the country are re-questing that they be put on...

In publicity
You fought against
All deceitfulness
On both sides of the fence
For a free press --
A Vox Pop --
Not a house organ
Of the incumbency.

And by virtue of
That free press
We were not
Obliged to act
As conspirators,
By candle light;
As horsemen
In the dark
Or slaves
Mumbling

The Searchlight
Spared no findings
Of Truth
In defending the things
And thoughts
That had made the Union

from the poem "He Ran Not In Vain"
by Floyd Hoke-Miller



© 1944 Hoke-Miller

THE STORY OF THE SEARCHLIGHT THE VOICE OF THE CHEVROLET WORKER

by

RONDA HAUBEN

with
Cartoons by 'Doc' Wilson
and
Poems by Floyd Hoke-Miller

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and the source are cited.

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Issued in honor of the

Sit-Down Picketing

On this the 50th Anniversary of the

Courageous and Determined

Victory

February 11, 1917

Flint, MI

DEDICATED

TO

FLOYD HOKE-MILLER

To the Bard of Local 659
On the 50th Anniversary
We dedicate this rhyme.

Down thru the years
You have sung the story
Of the workers' struggle
And of his glory.

You have panned the company
And the pork choppers too
And you have praised the worker
Fighting for his due.

You have played the role of Rebel
Though the times were cruel and hard
So we want you to know we are grateful
For the pathway you have trod.

But the struggle is not over
And so your efforts do not end
For the torch is still held proudly
By our dear REBEL FRIEND.

To Floyd
On this the 50th Anniversary
of the Great Flint Sit-Down Strike
Congratulations for over fifty years of
struggle and song!

VOICE OF THE CHEVROLET WORKERS
by Floyd Hoke-Miller

It matters not what bossmen say,
How much they rant and rave
Their Sunday suit and higher pay,
Do not exclude the grave.
* * *

The wage-slaves toil at their behest,
Producing only by their word
There's no denying one request,
Their voices must be heard.
* * *

They know quite well that banker men,
And owners of the tools
Connive with pie cards when they can,
To treat the laborers as fools.
* * *

Their language may not stand all tests,
But let them have their say
For on their backs the burden rests,
They MAKE the Chevrolet.

INTRODUCTION

LEST WE FORGET: IN TRIBUTE TO THE PIONEERS
OF THE GREAT FLINT SIT-DOWN STRIKE

Remember when the 'Sit Down' came?
And all the papers laid the claim
Against each Union Member's name?
"SUBVERSIVE!"
from the poem "Subversive"
by Floyd Hoke-Miller

Fifty years ago, on February 11, 1937, auto workers in Flint, Michigan marched triumphantly out of the factories they had occupied for 44-days. They had endured cold, tear gas, gun shot wounds, injunctions, etc., but they did indeed "Hold the Fort" until G.M. agreed to grant sole bargaining rights to their union, the UAW. One historian, evaluating the significance of the Sit Down, writes:

The era of the New Deal was studied with great strikes, many of them signifying an upheaval of unskilled labor in the nation's mass production industries.
(Thomas Karman, "The Flint Sit-Down Strike, Michigan History, June, 1962, p. 98)

The strike wave of the 1930's made it possible, for the first time to have industry-wide, rather than craft unions in the United States. But to understand the strike wave of the 1930's, it is necessary to look back to its roots in the 1880's.

"There has been labor unrest ever since there was a factory system," points out one commentator, "but the movement referred to

[In the 1930's-ed] can properly be traced back to 1886-87, a period of open warfare characterized for the first time by a series of important strikes on the issue of the right to organize and bargain collectively through nationwide unions." (Fortune Magazine, Nov. 1937)

The "right to organize and bargain collectively" was the long-sought goal of the labor movement through the fifty year period from the 1880's through the 1930's. That right had been conceded in other industrial countries, while it was bitterly resisted in the U.S.

American businessmen adamantly opposed this right. 35% of the workers in Britain were in unions and 70% of the Swedish workers were unionized in the mid '30's. But the U.S. nonagricultural labor force had only 18% of its workers in unions. Now in 1987, once again only 18% of the U.S. labor force--down from 37% in 1945--is unionized.

The period before and after the Depression of 1929 was one of radical technological change. The auto industry of the 1920's was heralded as the epitome of the modern world. It was pointed to as proof that the "old-fashioned" features of modern industrial life like trade unions had been "eliminated."

But for workers, the situation was quite different. Ken Malone, a '37 sit-downer described what life in the shops was like before the Depression:

We were a pretty good bunch of guys in those days. No Seniority. No Union. No Contract. No Committeeman. No Pay. No

Nothing but work, work, work, and more work. There wasn't a war on then, but we worked 14 hours a day, 7 days a week. Absenteeism was unheard of. Failure to report to work cost you your "job".

("Whadda Yuh Mean, Tough Cookies," The Searchlight, Jan. 20, 1944, p. 2)

The assembly line had become the definition of modern labor relations.

With the stock market crash of '29 came even more intolerable working conditions. Malone describes the effect of the Depression on his working conditions at GM:

About this time the depression hit. Thousands...were laid off without any means of making a living....I well remember the boss coming to me and saying, Ken, production has been cut out two-thirds and we are going to lay off a large number of men and here is the way we are going to do it. The next two weeks we are going to watch all men and see who runs the most production and WE ARE GOING TO KEEP THE MEN WHO RUN THE MOSTWe all speeded up, so instead of 70% being laid off it was 90%. After the lay off we worked about 2 days a week, but in those 2 days we did about 4 days work, for every-day the boss was threatening us if we didn't run more stock.

(Ibid.)

By the mid 1930's the economy was recovering, but there were still more than 11 million out of work. The AFL called for a Congressional Investigation into the new technology that management was using to displace workers. The headlines of a typical article in an AFL newspaper during the

period read: "Business Recovers, but Millions are Kept Jobless." (Flint Weekly Review, Jan. 17, 1936)

Workers were organizing and looking for some mechanism of fighting their intolerable conditions. In 1936 the newly formed UAW sent an organizer to Flint, MI the heart of the GM empire. Wyndham Mortimer wrote a series of articles he sent to workers describing the problems brought about by the rapid technological change and outlining the UAW program. In one article he describes the kind of trouble auto workers were facing:

"In Cleveland," he wrote, "1,000 workers have permanently lost their jobs as a result of the elimination of wood in the all steel bodies. In Norwood, Ohio, 200 men are permanently out of work for the same reason.There is the ever increasing productivity of the improved machinery that produces prodigiously with an ever decreasing number of workers." His articles proposed shorter hours, higher wages, and unionization in the mass production industries. ("Mortimer Points Out the Evils of New Machinery", FWR, Sept. 18, 1936)

To combat the growing movement for industry-wide unions, companies like General Motors introduced company unions, known as Works Councils. An individual grievance procedure was set up, but workers found the Works Councils, controlled as they were by the centralized power of GM management, powerless.

On Dec. 30, 1936, management in the Fisher II factory in Flint, MI tried to fire three UAW members. Fellow and sister workers stopped work and occupied the factory. The

major daily newspaper in Flint reported: "A sit-down strike in which 22 men are said to have taken part, halted all operations at the No. 2 plant of the Fisher Body Division here this morning...throwing 2,200 men out of work."

("Strike Halts Car Assembly",
Flint Journal, Dec. 30, 1936.)

A sit-downer in the plant remembers the story quite differently. Not twenty-two workers, but everyone he worked with stopped work to join the sit-down. "Everyone of those fellows," he recalls, "had pretty much the same idea and they weren't taught by anybody...The idea was to stay put and to hold the plant."

(Interview with Roscoe Rich,
December 30, 1986)

"We were," he stressed, "all different people thinking the same." Roscoe Rich, who was elected the Sit-downers' Chief of Police in Fisher II, explains that before the sit-down strike most of the men working in the plant didn't even know each other's names. But they got to know each other once the sit-down began. A lot, he explains, were young guys since GM usually threw a man out by the time he was 40. But he and others felt that working under such bad conditions meant "there were no tomorrows so what have you got to lose."

An anonymous sit-downer, writing in his strike diary, describes the seizure of the Fisher II plant on December 30, 1936 at 6:45 a.m.

Men waving arms -- they have fired some more union men. Stop the lines. Men shouting. Loud talking. The strike is on. Well

here we are Mr. Diary....This strike has been coming for years. Speed-up system, seniority, overbearing foremen. You can go just so far you know, even with working men. So let's you and I stick it out with the rest of the boys. We are right and when you're right you can't lose.
(from "Holding the Fort: A Sit-downer's Diary", Flint, MI, 1986)

Several hours later, on the afternoon of Dec. 30, workers at the Standard Cotton Products Co. a supplier for GM, sat down. Then around 10 p.m. that night, workers at the big Fisher I factory in Flint took over their plant.

"Thus began the first great auto strike, one of the most dramatic labor conflicts in our history," comments J. Raymond Walsh in his book CIO:Industrial Unionism In Action, (N.Y, 1937) He goes on to document how the impetus for the Flint Strike came from the ranks of the auto workers, in opposition to the leadership of the C.I.O. "The C.I.O. high command," he explains, "preoccupied with the drive in steel, tried in vain to prevent the strike; it was fed by deep springs of resentment among thousands of men against a corporation grossly derelict in its obligations..."(p.112)

Then on Jan. 3, 1937, 200 U.A.W. delegates from around the country met in Flint to create a Board of Strategy. They elected Kermit Johnson, a rank and file autoworker at the Chevrolet Engine Plant as the head of their strategy committee. The delegates authorized a formal corporation-wide strike and they served GM with a set of the following 8 demands:

"first of all, that the representatives

of the United Auto Workers and General Motors meet for an industry wide conference to discuss the differences between labor and management; second, that all piece-work be abolished and straight hourly rates of pay be adopted; third, that a thirty hour work week and a six hour workday be established with time and a half for overtime; fourth, that a minimum rate of pay commensurate with the American standard of living be established throughout the corporation's domestic plants; fifth, that all employees unjustly discharged be reinstated; sixth, that seniority rights be based upon length of service; seventh, that the UAW be recognized as the sole bargaining agent between General Motors and its employees; and, finally, the speed of production be mutually agreed upon by management and a union committee in all General Motors plants." (Thomas A. Karman, "The Flint Sit-Down Strike", Michigan History, June, 1962, pages 105 and 106.)

General Motors responded to the strikes with a back-to-work movement called the Flint Alliance (The Flint Alliance for the Security of Our Jobs, Our Homes and Our Community). The Flint Journal was filled with news of petitions signed by "happy" workers who wanted the strike ended. (Even in 1987, 50 years later, the Flint Journal is still trying to rewrite history, claiming that 91% of the workers in Chevrolet signed back-to-work petitions. See Flint Journal, Jan. 9, 1987, p. D1.)

A union newspaper called The Chevy Worker was started on Jan. 7, 1937 to counter the company back-to-work movement. One article in the first issue exposed how workers were being forced to sign the Flint Alliance petitions and were threatened if

they didn't sign. "A petition is supposed to be a voluntary expression of opinion," the article explained, "How voluntary are these petitions that you have had to sign Chevy workers:

Glance at a few facts.

1. Thursday morning, January 7th, a petition was circulated in Plant No 5 and those refusing to sign were told that their names would be referred to the office and that they would be ineligible for loans from the company thereafter."

The article goes on to give other examples of supervisors threatening workers to solicit their signatures.

While the petitions were being passed around and forced on workers by supervision, a group of workers meeting outside the Chevy union hall were attacked by some GM supervisors: "Violence has been started in this strike by the co," Chevy workers reported, "We know who the men were ... We are going to name the dirty rats right here and now, so that they can be shunned by all honest men." ("GM Starts Violence", Chevy Auto Workers, vol. 1, no. 2, Jan. 8, 1937)

The police came and arrested not the attackers, but the victims of the attack. Two union men were taken off to jail. The police charged them with fighting with each other. 200 demonstrators went to the jail protesting the arrest and demanding the release of the two. In the meantime, a union member from Fisher I, William Coburn, leaving the demonstration, was hit by a car and died as a result of his injuries.

On Jan. 11, 1937, police tried to cut off food to the strikers in Fisher II. A battle ensued when the police shot tear gas and shot-gun bullets at the strikers and their supporters who surrounded the plant. At midnight," reported Rose Pesotta, a CIO organizer who was sent to the scene, "the police tried a second time to force their way into the plant, but were met by a deluge of cold water from a fire-hose and an avalanche of two-pound steel automobile hinges. The cops' line broke under this defensive onslaught. Defeated and shame-faced they left the scene at top speed." (Bread Upon the Waters, N.Y., 1944, p. 241-2)

The victorious battle of Jan. 11 became known as the Battle of Bulls Run, for the police, who were at that time called "bulls", had been routed.

Pesota visited the sit-downers inside the occupied plants and describes how they endured the 44-day ordeal to hold to their goal. She writes:

Newspapers and periodicals of various political shades, labor papers and mystery magazines were among the reading matter in evidence....Most of these men had worked for Fisher Body from four to 12 years. They told me it was tough to sit around and do nothing after the speed-up had got into their blood. 'But I'll sit here till hell freezes under me,' said one. 'I won't give up the fight for I know where I'll land if we don't win this time.' (p. 238-239)

Each occupied plant had its own governing body to make decisions and to carry out discipline. There was a kangaroo court charged with disciplining violations of the regulations passed. There were sanitation

committees, recreation committees, educational committees, among others. "Punch Press", the official strike bulletin of the sit-downers, provided the following description of how strikers organized themselves in the plants:

The most astonishing feeling you get in the sit-down plants is that of ORDER. Every activity is systematized. Communications are automatic; each striker has his hours of duty, his hours of play and rest; there is an organization set up for every routine problem, plus a lot of other problems; if you want first-aid, it is a department, a subdivision of Welfare; Transportation? That also is a section by itself. Would you beautify yourself? It has a department. The plant has been re-administered. As one striker said, "No matter what happens, this plant will never be the same again!"

("Punch Press, Official Strike Bulletin", No.7
U.A.W.A. Local #156, p.1)

By January, 1937 strikes had shut down a large part of GM's operations. Almost all of the company's 200,000 employees were out on strike or were out of work because of the lack of parts. Eighteen plants in ten cities were on strike. Besides Flint, the other cities hit by strikes were Detroit, St. Louis, Mo. Toledo, Ohio, Cleveland, Ohio, Janesville, Wisc., Anderson, Ind and Norwood, Ohio, Atlanta, Georgia, Kansas City, Mo.

GM seemed to be getting desperate. There were growing indications that the company was willing to try to use violence to break the strike. Mobs had attacked strikers in Anderson, Ind. on Jan 27, in Bay

City, MI on Jan 27, and in Anderson, Ind on Jan. 28. The sit-downers felt that it was important to go on the offensive. But they understood the need to take into account the presence of company-planted stool pigeons inside the union, as shown through the LaFollette investigation being conducted by Congress. Rose Pesota, explains, "As in war, something unexpected and startling was called for...." (p. 243)

What followed was one of the most skillful strategic plans used by labor in all of American history. Kermit Johnson, the rank and file chairman of the '37 strike strategy committee describes what was done:

A few of us on the strike committee had met almost constantly for a week on a plan to shut down the Motor Plant of ChevroletPlant 4 was huge and sprawling, a most difficult target, but extremely important to us because the corporation was running the plant, even though they had to stockpile motors in anticipation of favorable court action; G.M. had already recovered from the first shock of being forced to surrender four of their largest body shops to sit-down strikes. They already had the legal machinery in motion that would, within a short time, expel by force if necessary the strikers from the plants. If that happened, we knew the strike would be broken. (from "Lest We Forget", The Searchlight, Flint, MI, Feb. 11, 1960.)

Kermit Johnson and the rest of the strike strategy committee realized that if they could get and hold Plant 4, they could stop production sufficiently to mortally wound GM. But 100 feet from plant 4 was the company personnel building which was used as

an arsenal for the company police.

"Even the top leadership in the CIO, including John L. Lewis," Kermit wrote, "were seriously worried about the GM situation. When Lewis' right-hand man, John Brophy, approved our plan of action, he did it with great reluctance and a complete lack of confidence. He couldn't conceive of a successful strike in a plant that was less than one-fourth organized."

The strike strategy committee developed a diversionary plan. They held a meeting of carefully chosen union men, but insuring that included was a General Motors' stool pigeon. They convinced the men at the meeting that they would take Plant 9, despite the fact that Plant 4 was the vital plant for Chevrolet production. The stool pigeon convinced GM that the strikers planned to seize Plant 9. Thus the strikers lured the plant guards away from Plant 4. With the guards gone, the thousands of workers in Plant 4 were able to fight the necessary battles against supervision and company goons to gain control of their plant. And when the police tried to enter Plant 4, they were stopped at the gate by the Women's Emergency Brigade, a paramilitary group of women wearing red tams and red armbands who played a crucial role in defending the sit-downers.

Writers in Fortune Magazine in Nov. 1937 were compelled to admit, "Out of all the sensational news of the auto strike, the seizing of Chevy IV was the high point." They saw it as an "illustration of labor's growing initiative...it serves as a landmark," they acknowledged, "measuring how far labor had traveled in less than three

years and through some 4,000 strikes."

On February 11, 1937, sit-downers emerged from their occupied factories and joined a long parade through the streets of downtown Flint. General Motors had been forced to sign a one page document conceding to the UAW the basis to become the sole bargaining agent for the auto workers.

The sit-downers went back to work by Feb. 18. They found that GM had not changed. To the contrary, the LaFollette Committee hearings document how GM management singled out union people and threatened or tried to fire them when they returned to work. In Chevrolet, Arnold Lenz, the anti-union plant manager, marched 1000 men armed with clubs through the plant. And the workers fought back, sometimes with slowdowns, sometimes with sit-down strikes as their way to resolve grievances or settle injustices. For example, there were slowdowns at Plant No. 4 and No. 8 in Flint on March 6 when 6500 workers sat down, and on March 8, 500 workers in Plant 4 sat down. (Sidney Fine, Sit-Down, Ann Arbor, Mi, 1969, p. 322)

Floyd Hoke-Miller, a sit-downer in Plant 4, sums up the victory of '37. "We didn't win the war, but we developed the unity to fight the coming battles."

The sit-downers of '37 went on to lead the fight for the contractual rights workers have today: seniority, a grievance procedure, vacation pay, COLA, pensions, 30 and out retirement, medical insurance, etc. The story of how they won these gains is even less known than the little known story of the Great Flint Sit Down Strike. But the story is a tremendously important one.

The Chevy Worker, the newspaper started by the Chevy workers on Jan. 7, 1937 to name the "dirty rats...so that they can be shunned by all honest men" became the precursor of shop papers put out by UAW locals across the country.

The newspaper put out by the Plant 4 sit-downers, was called The Searchlight. It was subtitled, "The Voice of the Chevrolet Worker." In testimony before the War Labor Board in Washington, G.M.'s Director of Labor Relations complained, "We always had a tough bunch of cookies up at Chevrolet-Flint to deal with. That was the breeding ground for the sit-down strikes...It is this same group of people," he went on, "that we thought that through the evolution of labor relationship...would probably be changed and improved." He lamented, "They are now back in the saddle and one very interesting paper (The Searchlight, official local publication) they got out recently is directed at 'Herr Thomas' [Pres. of the UAW-ed]. So the worm has turned and they have got their own union officials, some of whom they dislike, to replace us in the news." (The Flint Journal, January 7, 1944)

In response, George Carroll, the first editor of The Searchlight, explained, "We have criticized (not attacked) R. J. Thomas [Pres. of UAW-ed] and Phillip Murray [Pres. of CIO-ed] and shall continue to exercise the right to criticize as long as they pursue a policy we feel to be detrimental to the best interests of the membership of this Local."

Floyd Hoke-Miller, co-editor of The Searchlight, replied in verse to the labeling the Chevy workers as "tough cookies":

You can't be nice to human lice
That feed upon your blood,
And boast with pride about their side
A liftin' you outta the mud."
(from "Tough Cookies: With No Apologies" by
Floyd Hoke-Miller.")

In 1987, all of the gains of the past
50 years won by the hard efforts of the sit-
downers and the workers who followed in
their footsteps, are under attack. And the
sit-down pioneers are still being treated as
"subversives". UAW union officials have
vetoed any appropriate commemoration to mark
the 50th anniversary of Feb. 11 in Flint or
elsewhere in Michigan. But if the story of
The Searchlight is known, there will be the
basis to carry on the proud tradition of
Feb. 11, 1937.



THE STORY OF THE SEARCHLIGHT

If the Labor press does not try to give
Labor the whole truth, where will Labor
get it? This, of course, raises the
question: Who is right about Labor's
destiny? Certainly we can't rely on the
capitalist press to tell us, for it is
obvious that their interest is the
opposite of Labor's interest. But who,
from the ranks of Labor? Let them all
speak -- that's what Free Speech was
intended for! Let them all present
their view in a forum. From that the
reader will have a fair chance to de-
cide.(1)

from the column, "Only More Democ-
racy Can Save Democracy," The
Searchlight, Oct. 29, 1949.

In the years following their historic
1936-1937 Sit-Down strike the Flint Chevro-
let workers created a local union newspaper,
The Searchlight (UAW Local 659-Flint, Michi-
gan).(2) The masthead of the newspaper pro-
claimed itself "The Voice of the Chevrolet
worker."(3) From its beginnings in 1942, and
through much of the 1950's, members of the
local were able to use the newspaper as a
forum for the voice of the rank and file
auto worker.(4)

Through the almost two decades that it
managed to stave off suppression from the
International Union, The Searchlight opened
its pages to a wide spectrum of opinion from
rank and file members. The newspaper printed
articles, uncensored columns, cartoons,
poetry, letters and shop news from a large
number of contributors.(5) And during W.W.
II, it printed servicemen's letters sent to
it from all over the world. Also, period-

ically letters to the editor appeared criticizing the local union leadership for interfering with rank and file access to the newspaper. (6)

The discussion and debate filling the pages of The Searchlight helped the rank and file auto worker to clarify a number of important questions. The victory of the 1936-37 Flint auto workers' strike won the sit-downers a "freedom of the press" that they were able to exercise and guard throughout the 1940's and into the 1950's. Through The Searchlight, which was the newspaper of the largest of the Flint locals, the rank and file publicly debated their differences and criticized their foes. Not unexpectedly, with the suppression of the "Voice of the Chevrolet Worker" in the 1950's, the contribution of the previous decade was virtually blacked out. And the struggles and achievements of the Flint workers who produced The Searchlight have either been ignored by historians, or else maligned. For example, a paper, presented at a Labor History Conference, comparing workers from Flint, Michigan and Coventry, England, erroneously portrays the Flint working class after W.W. II as "conservative" and submissive to autocratic International leadership. (7)

What follows is an effort to tell the story of The Searchlight as "The Voice of the Chevrolet Worker," by drawing on a small sampling of the kinds of contributions that appeared in it until this voice was all but publically silenced.

Carl Johnson was one of the pioneers of industrial unionism in Flint. (8) From the early days of The Searchlight, until his death in 1958, Johnson wrote a column called

"Only More Democracy Can Save Democracy." (9) In this column, he discussed questions of socialism, criticisms of capitalism, and other broad social and economic issues. And his column helped to articulate the importance to the rank and file worker of a newspaper uncensored by local or International union leadership.

Johnson's column of March 23, 1944 explains how the "uncensored" local union newspaper was one of the major components of the program of progressive unionists in his day. He outlines the three points of this program:

The first...a paper which permits a full range of uncensored opinion.
The second...round table discussions and forums.
The third...an independent political party.

A district meeting of editors from ten local union newspapers from Lansing, Saginaw, and Flint, was held at Local 659 in 1944. At this meeting the editors discussed "the uncensored column." "Such an item," the summary in The Searchlight explained, "would not only be valuable in telling the minority view, but by printing conflicting opinions side by side it would enlarge the reader's knowledge of his problem." (The Searchlight, Dec. 21, 1944, p.1) (10)

In his column of Feb. 1, 1945, Johnson elaborates on how open discussion serves labor:

If local union publications...provide the ranks with a freer discussion which alone can prepare the ranks for the

fight which is sure to be plenty tough, then we need not worry too much, for American labor proved in '36 and '37 that it can move fast and furiously when it knows where to go.

The hurdles he saw facing labor were not only how to deal with wages, hours, etc., but also how to bring about fundamental social change. He wrote:

We must bear in mind the obvious fact that our education institutions, the schools, the Daily press, the radio, etc., are all controlled by Big Business -- by that small section of the population which suffers little from the hardships of depression and war. As a matter of fact, depression and war are the result of the part Big Business plays in our economy. Does it stand to reason therefore that their controlled institutions will teach us how to change it?

(March 1, 1945, p.3)

In 1951, Local 659 was preparing a conventional challenge of the International Executive Board's interference with the editorial policy of The Searchlight. Johnson's column spelled out why the publication policy of a newspaper of the rank and file worker would inevitably come into conflict with the interests of the International leadership. He explained:

A paper controlled by the International, without the watchful eye of local shop-papers, would make it very easy for the top leadership to perpetuate themselves in office and form a bureaucracy. Such a situation would permit

our top leaders to disregard the well being of the ranks even as far as unionism is concerned.

More important, from a long range standpoint, however, is the fact that International publications are limited in the extent to which they spearhead progressive change. They are apt to confine themselves to matters connected solely with unionism such as the Taft-Hartley Act. That might be all right if unionism were the end solution which, however, it is not. The final solution to labor's problems will not be reached until those who do essential work, hand and brain, are in control instead of that non-essential class which controls because of ownership. But because that concept has not as yet gained popular clamour, our leadership will not stick their necks out to speak for it in their publications....

The rank and file are in a different position. They have nothing to lose by advancing ideas and opinions which may, for the time being, be at variance with popular concepts. Moreover, a rank and filer with ideas of change which promise greatly improved conditions for him as well as for his fellow workers has therein the necessary incentive to express those ideas. It is important to understand, therefore, that the future welfare of the rank and file depends largely upon the part the ranks play in shaping that future....

(January 11, 1951, p.2)

Johnson also saw the need for a local union newspaper to monitor the activities of

THE SEARCHLIGHT

Thursday, January 20, 1944

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Lost and Found

LOST—Frat Whitney, Plant 5. Men between the ages of 18 and 38 may volunteer for the new Thermos bottle, with a red top. It belonged to my son who is in service. Please return to Station 1, Inspector 579046.

DO YOU WANT TO LOSE YOUR VOICE?

By Ken Madson
Brothers and Sisters, do you wish to have your "Searchlight" suspended?

If you do, then just listen to the whispering campaigns that are going on in the shop and in the lobby of the union hall. These campaigns are being carried on daily. They are being carried on by people who contribute nothing to the paper. It may be they can't write.

In the last membership meeting there were several attempts by a very few to circulate the paper. Some even advised control a la Hitler. I mean complete abolition of it. These few people who would take your paper from you are those who want complete control of your union to the detriment of the membership.

Compassionately speaking, there are few members who attend membership meetings, so consequently few know what goes on in their union. One might answer that by saying that it is my member's fault that he doesn't attend meetings to keep abreast of his union. That's very true, but I suppose each of you, I, 1,000 members decided to attend a membership meeting; how would we accommodate them? Our main auditorium will seat probably 500 at the most.

Others may say, oh well, that is a remote possibility that all our members may decide to attend the same meetings. With that I agree. But because of such excuses are we going to close our eyes and ears to these attempts to remove the last semblance of aggressiveness from our union? I may be wrong.

Going back to the last membership meeting, I said there were 9

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the union leadership:

The working Rank and File must have some means of knowing what is going on in the union. That is the philosophy behind the "Searchlight"....The publicity organ of the union such as the "Searchlight" must provide full freedom of expression and be under the control of the ranks....Free union papers may not seem important but they make good watch dogs and they serve to bring the grass roots into the realm of our solely wanting democracy.

(April 18, 1957, p.2)

The broad ranging polemics that Carl Johnson describes, as well as the debate over union demands and the overseeing of leadership filled the pages of The Searchlight during this 20 year period.

The end of W.W. II saw a rising spiral of prices, raising the question of how labor should deal with inflation. The question was taken up in The Searchlight. One columnist, examining the problem, wrote:

There has been much discussion in Labor circles during these post war years about such things as 'roll back prices', 'price control', 'ability to pay', 'escalator clauses', etc. in an effort to find a solution and a cure for Labor's economic ills.

(Jan. 15, 1948, p.7)

A series of articles appeared in The Searchlight exploring the relationship of wages to prices. "Do Wages Determine Prices?" one article asked. Appearing in a column called "Winning for the union," the

ONLY MORE DEMOCRACY CAN SAVE DEMOCRACY

By Carl Johnson

A RANK & FILE POST-WAR PLAN — ART. X

VITAL EDUCATION

Since collective bargaining was shown to Washington (in case of the W.L.R.) it left little of fundamental value except education to the union.

However, if we thoroughly consider the value of labor education if the right kind, we shall see that after all it is the most important of all union activity when viewed in the light of labor's long range interests.

Important as the collective bargaining issues are, they are small compared with the overall Social, Economic and Political issues that must come to a showdown in the near future.

In this country as well as the world in general, we are at the fork in the road in a darkness of ideological confusion. Only in the light of a new vital kind of education can we see the way.

writer explained:

Prices go up or down depending on market conditions. When the boss puts his product on the market he can't set prices to suit himself. But in the long run the price of any article depends on its actual value. That is, on the number of hours of labor workers had to put in on it. That is what determines the price, regardless of whether the wages we get for labor is high or low. The price of a product, therefore, does not depend on wages.

(June 5, 1947, p.3)

Referring to a recent wage increase, the writer observed that his raise did not corrolate with an increase in prices:

In fact, when mass production methods were introduced in the automobile industry, the price of cars went down. This was because the labor time on each car was greatly reduced. Yet we automobile workers got higher wages through our union.

(Ibid.)

The article goes on to show how higher wages don't cause higher prices, but they do result in lower profits:

Wages don't determine prices, but they do affect profits. Both profits and wages come from one source -- the value of the goods produced by labor. This means that if pay is raised it must come out of profits. Likewise, if wages are cut profits go up. That is why employers never willingly give wage

increases. They know it comes from their pockets. They know it is wages and profits that are tied together, not wages and prices....The fact that they raise such a fuss every time we ask for more money shows that they don't believe their own argument.

(Ibid.)

In another article in the series, the writer discusses how prices are determined:

You may as well know it. There is no 'law' of supply and demand. Under competitive conditions it is value which will determine price over a period of time. Value is determined by the amount of necessary human labor required to produce the commodity under the latest technological development. Prices will fluctuate around value. When supply is below demand, prices will temporarily rise above value. If supply becomes greater than demand, prices will fall below value until production is reduced. That value is the basic determining factor in determining price can be seen when we ask ourselves what the price would be when supply and demand are equal. It is obvious, price would then equal value.

(August 14, 1947, p.7)

The practical value of this discussion in 1947 was that there was a debate ongoing within the union over the appropriate contract demand. Based on their understanding that wages do not create inflation, but do lead to lower profits, the members of Local 659 put forward the "escalator clause" as the appropriate contract demand:

An escalator clause in every union contract whereby a sliding scale of wage increases will be granted for every percentage increase in prices. This is our answer to employer created inflation.

(March 27, 1947)

After W.W. II Walter Reuther, head of the U.A.W.-G.M. Department proposed that the corporations open their books. Unlike the Flint workers' analysis that profits and wages were in opposition, Reuther maintained that workers and G.M. would both benefit from a common policy. He maintained that both profits and wages could be increased without raising prices or else he would lower the union wage demands:

We are prepared to settle this demand for less than 30 percent, providing you can disprove our contention that wages can be increased 30 percent without increasing prices and you can still make a profit. If you can prove we can't get 30 percent, hold prices, and still make a nice profit, we will settle for less than 30 percent....(12)

When Local 659 and four other Flint locals promoted a resolution in favor of an escalator clause in the upcoming 1948 contract talks, the International union leadership opposed the resolution, arguing that an escalator would freeze the standard of living of the workers. And a radio talk made by the President of Local 659 in January, 1948 in support of the escalator clause was criticized by the International union leadership for breaking "union discipline" and weakening "union solidarity" on the eve of crucial negotiations, by making public pronounce-

ments in defiance of official union policy." (13)

When the cost of living escalator clause was won in 1948, Reuther claimed G.M. was responsible for introducing the idea of an escalator into the 1948 contract talks. This served to hide the real history of how local unions like Local 659 had fought for and won the cost of living over the opposition of the International union leadership.

While the contributors to The Searchlight were able, to some degree, to solve the problem of inflation, they had less success on the political front.

In 1944, they had been active in the efforts to form the Michigan Commonwealth Federation, based on the Canadian model of a labor party. In 1946, they again made an effort to contribute towards the formation of an independent political party to represent labor and working people.

The 1946 election was seen as a defeat for labor's policy of supporting the so called "friends" of labor (the CIO-PAC, i.e. the Political Action Committee). One columnist, analyzing the lessons of the election, wrote:

After the battle comes the critique--as the military men say. And it isn't a half-bad idea. A review of our fight with a critical eye and a bit of speculation as to how we might have improved our position.

Our position now is that we, the American people, have suffered a defeat in the elections by a so-called "Republi-

can land-slide"....The people are fed up with the Truman administration and its betrayal of the New Deal....Generally speaking, the voters had little to vote for other than to protest a deal from the bottom of the deck. The public is the victim of a "bipartisan coalition"...The proof of what the people want is the victory of a third party in New York, the American Labor Party.
("The People's Mandate", Nov. 21, 1946, p.2)

The Presidential election was followed by anti-labor political initiatives like the Callahan Bill and the Taft Hartley Act. How was labor to deal with this political crisis? A number of articles appeared in The Searchlight proposing independent political action as the needed solution. One such writer explained:

Today every demand of the workers is shunned by the employers to their agents in Washington. The whole government is arrayed against labor's interests....Just as labor must conduct a militant, independent struggle on the economic field, simultaneously it must wage an independent political struggle aimed at winning government power. It is time to break once and for all with company unionism in the political field now.

("To End Wars and Depressions,"
Aug. 28, 1947, p.3)

There was considerable debate over what form this independent political action should take. On this question, probably more than any other, the influence of the various radical groups over their sympathizers in

the local was particularly apparent. The followers of Trotsky placed special emphasis that the party formed be strictly a "labor" party. While the Communist Party and its sympathizers opposed a "labor" party per se, and insisted instead that the proposed party be a "third" party, i.e. not restricted to labor. (e.g. See "We Need a Labor Party, Not a Third Party", Aug. 15, 1946, p.7; "Only a Fight for Democracy Can Save Democracy," Aug. 14, 1947, p.3; and "The Truth Shall Make You Free," Jan. 27, 1948, p.8.)

By 1948, one columnist declared that the effort to form an independent political party had failed. Citing a lack of democratic procedures at the local's labor party committee meetings, the columnist explained that a successful labor party "can never come from an already existing minority party." Though this columnist didn't feel the minority parties could lead a labor party, he felt they should be included.

"Of course," he wrote, "all parties should be embraced, but none should control it. It would have to be controlled by labor itself." He also cautioned against trusting the words of the union's International leadership. "Some of our educational committees are sure off the beam," he commented, "when they say R. J. Thomas [then UAW President-ed] is out for a labor party." He has been a vice-president of the National CIO for the past eight or ten years, and PAC, the political branch of CIO, has never come out for a labor party yet." This writer proposed that there was only one avenue toward resolving the problem of creating the needed party. "It is a dead cinch," he concluded, "that if a labor party is ever born in this country, it will have to come from the grass roots of

the working class." (15)

Another columnist who was a sympathizer of the Socialist Party [of Debs-ed] advised that the form of the party was not significant. Citing divergent beginnings of the British Labor Party and the Canadian Commonwealth Federation, he argued that any beginning would be adequate as long as there were "rank and file participation and education." ("Addes and a Third Party," Nov. 7, 1946, p.8)

Besides the debate over the form a party should take, some (like Wobbly sympathizers in the local) felt an independent political party would be a harmful diversion from developing the labor union. As one such contributor explained:

I used to be of the opinion that workers could win concessions through politicians who professed to be friends of labor, but now I know better. What the workers need is a strong union that refuses to sell them out to the bosses or politicians. But we don't have one....

In closing, I appeal to you to forget the political parties, the red-baiting campaigns and all other drives that are detrimental to the Union. Let's combine our forces to restrain the Murrays, the Reuthers...and all others of their ilk from hoodwinking us (the dues payers) into forgetting our Union issues and degrading ourselves into personal attacks or some other issue that lies outside the union.

("How Many Strikes Before You're Out?", Oct. 7, 1948, p. 6)

Along with these polemics, the local formed a labor party committee, ran candidates in Flint local elections, held meetings, and passed resolutions asking the international union to promote a labor party. But the efforts never yielded any substantial results. After the failure of the 1948 Progressive Party campaign with Henry Wallace running for President, the question of an independent political party for labor receded into the background, unsolved.

Influenced by the working class tradition symbolized by Eugene Debs, the pages of The Searchlight often echoed, too, with criticisms of supporting big business in their wars, as in "A New Year With Old Trim," one of the many poems that appeared in the newspapers pages.

A New Year comes, an Old Year goes
And with its passing all the woes
That ill-befalls the working class
Are passed in parcel to he who works
By grace of Greed and he who shirks
The pangs of toil or call of Brass.

The war was fought, the war was won
By those who made and used the gun
But all the spoils went to the few
Who beat the drum and waved the flag
And used the printed page to brag
Of how they'd made the world anew.
(Jan. 15, 1948, p.2)

Such sentiments were expressed in letters and articles as well. During W.W. II, The Searchlight carried a letter from a serviceman condemning the war:

God's on our side, they tell us. Well, that's good. I suppose he was the one

that tore the head off a body I found yesterday. Without the head, and with most of the uniform gone, it was hard to tell at first that he was, or rather had been, an enemy. But God must have known, because, bam -- off went his head! (I don't know who takes the heads off our boys.)

Christmas, 1944, and here I am sitting looking down at a big brown stain at the bottom of my pant-leg, sort of wondering who it came from, and if whoever he was had a girl like Helen waiting for him, and folks like you and Dad and Mom at home.

(Jan. 4, 1945, p. 1-2)

Such sentiments appeared during the Korean War as well, as in this open letter:

You see, if it weren't for the PHONY WAR program, we wouldn't have to contribute so much to the upkeep of the bosses wholesale global murder. You then could also be fairly sure you weren't raising your kids for gun fodder in order to protect a lousey system that should have been put out of business long ago.

(Nov. 15, 1951, p.4)

And these same sentiments were conveyed in the poem "Of Wage Slaves and Caesars," published June 14, 1951:

Omar Khayyam, the Persian poet, said:
'Me thinks there never bloomed a rose
so red
As where some dying Caesar bled!
But down the ages since his time
Most other poets in their rhyme

Have sung of Caesars as sublime,
Whose warring quests they glorified
And praised the peons who bled and
died--

But wars have filled no empty maws
Nor won the workers no holy cause.

Not only did The Searchlight open its pages to criticism of the policies of management and politicians, but it also took up to praise the brave deeds of the unsung heroes from its ranks. When militant unionists became seriously ill or died, they were eulogized in articles, as in these excerpts from the obituary of Jimmy Kiger:

Jimmy Kiger died as he lived. He fought heroically against a dreaded disease...On his death certificate they will write 'Death due to cancer.' We can truthfully say that Jim Kiger was killed by a social system that has outlived its useful purpose to man.... It smashed at his physical body through the years with its crises, depressions and devastating wars. The most telling blow was the recent news of the death of his son, CALVIN, on the carnage fields of Korea. This dreadful report came while cancer was spreading relentlessly through his system....Thus died a Chevrolet Union militant who had served his brothers in Union struggles as an elected officer of our local.... Even as a holder of many posts, Jim Kiger considered himself as a rank and file member of the labor movement.... Jim denounced the Korean War before and after the death of his son. Jim Kiger could not be intimidated or silenced.

(Oct. 18, 1951, p.3)

And the heroic deeds of the rank and file were eulogized in poetry, as in "The Curtain's Down":

In all respects, let it be said:
The curtain's down, the act is over
The Reaper's played the final score
And many mourn because you're dead.

It's surely true the world's a stage
With each a part -- a chosen role
And time allotted for each soul
To play it's part and turn the page.

To those of us still in the show.
We'll not forget how well you played--
The Union Man so unafraid --
That boss-men knew how far to go.

The rebel cause was better served
Because of honest men like you
Who played THE MANY AND THE FEW
Without the honor they deserved.

(Dedicated to the pleasant memory of
Clyde Boone, a good and faithful union-
ist who passed the "Great Divide" on
May 30th 1963.)
(June 20, 1963)

By 1949, an important question being discussed in the U.A.W. was pensions.

During this same period, a debate over the virtues and criticisms of capitalism appeared in The Searchlight. In an article called "The Welfare State," the writer criticized that a "Socialist or what's worse, a welfare state" was growing up in the U.S. (See December 15, 1949). Carl Johnson's column in the following issue carried a response:

When union members find themselves in the wide disagreement indicated by Brother...s article...on questions of vital importance to the future of Labor, it is necessary to debate those question.

Regarding the so-called Welfare State, when it provides unemployment insurance, health insurance, old age pensions, aid to education, etc., it is NOT giving labor something for nothing....It is not Socialism, but rather an attempt to give labor, to a limited extent, the social services it can expect from Socialism. It is promoted by non-Socialists not to bring Socialism, but to forestall Socialism.
(Dec. 29, 1949, p.2)

The author of "The Welfare State" article replied:

While I am aware of, and am opposed to, the enormous profits made and the abuses permitted under the free enterprise system, I am convinced the world had made more progress under the system than any other method that has been tried in over 26 civilizations that this world has seen....If we are to continue a free people here in America with its present standard of living, then there must be money to plan, to invest, to manufacture, to advertise and to sell, all creating jobs for countless millions....The free enterprise system has transformed this country from a young poor country into the wealthiest nation on earth in spite of two world wars.

(March 9, 1950)

Others joined the debate.

Bert Boone, who had been the President of Local 659 from 1944 to 1945, and had returned to the shop when his bid for reelection was defeated, added his contribution. He wrote:

A few scissorbills(17) are alarmed at the Welfare State.

Those few alarmists have either heard some politician squeal that way or have read it in some of these wonderful unbiased dailies. Some defend the so-called Free Enterprise system. There is no such thing. Free Enterprise is as extinct as Democracy. We only have MONOPOLY CAPITALISM....As for the Welfare State, that is a deliberate lie. More than one half of President Truman's federal budget was earmarked for WAR, only 6 per cent for so-called welfare. It looks more like a military state to me.

(March 23, 1950, p.2)

His solution to the problem was the Wobbly ideal of one big Union:

Workers must liberate themselves -- the labor skates and politicians won't do it. They'll connive to cheat labor.

Let's build a real labor union and abolish capitalism. Let's leave Washington and Lansing to the politicians. We'll let them run the weather bureau while we run the works to make life abundant for us.

Boone had opposed the International

union leadership's "No Strike Pledge" during his presidency, and the International had opposed his efforts to run for another term in office. When he was defeated in 1945, he appealed the results of the election citing 868 unregistered ballots that had appeared in the election count in excess of the local's membership.(18) Returning to the shop, he contributed articles for The Searchlight until his death on April 9, 1969. Boone's term in office was considered by many to have set a model for open and above board leadership.(20)

Another columnist to jump into the "Free Enterprise" debate was George Carroll. He had served as the first editor of The Searchlight from 1942 - 1945. He criticized any favorable portrayal of "Free Enterprise" writing:

This article is not in any sense to be considered a brief for any ism, creed or philosophy, but if so-called "Free Enterprise" advocates do not soon curb their rampant rapacity, they will soon find themselves tottering on the brink of an economic grave.

No system can long endure which permits corporations to arrogantly boast of profits of more than half of billion dollars while in another section of the same country hundreds of thousands of American workers are reported to be starving and veterans who fought to preserve the right to continued existence are forced to live in habitations little better than pens or dog kennels.
(April 6, 1950, p.3)

Carroll's column "Your Poverty Flat and

Mine" appeared off and on (21) until his death in October, 1954. (22) He had been active in the early days of Local 659, during and after the 1936-37 Sit-Down Strike, serving as committeeman and then helping to establish The Searchlight in May, 1942. As editor during the war years, he was also an active member of Local 659 "draft dodgers committee" which worked to expose so that supervisors and company men did not get preferential treatment at their draft boards.

To protest Bert Boone's election defeat under very questionable circumstances, Carroll resigned as editor of The Searchlight. Summarizing his term as editor, he wrote:

'The Searchlight' is the only (local union) paper which has ever been damned by the heads of General Motors in the Public press, and the only paper ever blasted by name on the convention floor by R.J. Thomas. And all simply because I thought it was my duty to keep our membership informed in regard to matters which concerned them, which I did and for which I have no apologies to make.

(March 5, 1945, p.1)

Not only did The Searchlight take on the social, political and economic problems confronting the rank and file union member (24), but it also took up its obligation to debate and criticize the policies and actions of union leaders.

By 1949, a bitter feud had developed between The Searchlight's policy of maintaining an uncensored press and Walter

Reuther's efforts to consolidate his control of the U.A.W. Reuther had negotiated the first U.A.W. Pension Plan with the Ford Motor Company. Local 659 had wanted:

- 1) Pension Plan for all GM workers with 20 years service or 55 years of age, whichever comes first.
- 2) Health, hospitalization, medical and life insurance paid for by the corporation. (Dec. 1, 1949, p.3)

The pages of The Searchlight bristled with criticisms and resolutions opposing the inadequacy of the Ford agreement. (25) The text of the plan was printed as well as accounts of the International Union's letters and meetings to try to curb its Flint opposition. Walter Reuther was the subject of some harsh criticism printed in The Searchlight. One article complained:

Due to his miserable settlement with Ford, President Walter Reuther has suffered a severe loss of prestige among the UAW ranks and local leaders. If you wonder why, read the Ford agreement. (Nov. 3, 1949, p. 3)

Another article predicted that Reuther would follow in the former U.A.W. President Martin's footsteps:

I was just wondering if the Ford Motor Company is planning on giving Bus-ter (26) Reuther a good position when he is defeated for reelection at the next UAW Convention.

If I remember correctly, this was

done to Buster Homer Martin, the ex-preacher and former President of the Auto Workers....The Busters in General Motors have struggled along with these lousy contracts that Buster Reuther has been getting but that Pension Plan at Ford has brought the curtain down on his ACTS.

(Nov. 3, 1949, p.3)

Throughout this struggle over the Ford Pension Plan, issues of local union autonomy and the right to criticize union leadership were repeatedly reaffirmed by rank and file members.

Coburn Walker, president of Local 659 during this period, and a former Reuther supporter, had taken up active opposition to the Ford Plan. Letters in The Searchlight applauded this opposition as representative of the rank and file. One letter in the January 26, 1950 issue said:

Coburn Walker stated his position in the Searchlight so the entire membership could understand that which was supposed to be the pattern for the rest of us who toil for our daily bread in the Auto Industry. THAT was the proper thing for our President to do. He is our servant (not our boss) and it's no secret that the entire membership has certainly criticized the Ford Pension.

Another letter in the January 12, 1950 issue complained about the attacks by the U.A.W. International on Walker.

I think he [Coburn Walker -ed] has done a fine job and I feel he had every right in the world to criticize the



Ford Pension Plan without being attacked by our Regional office.

And in "The President's Column," which appeared in every issue during this period, Coburn Walker charged that the 40,000 letters sent to all Flint members of the U.A.W. by the International Officers criticizing opposition to the Ford Plan was a violation of Local Union Autonomy. He wrote:

Since under the International Constitution we are guaranteed local autonomy, and since we are obligated by the mandates of our local union to carry out the policy and program as laid down by the rank and file, we feel it is most regrettable that the International Executive Board should have taken the action which they did and which is confirmed by the letter dated December 1. On the other hand, it may be prompted by some individual member of the Executive Board who had more interest in the future and the perpetuation of his job than the membership whom he represents....If and when the procedure becomes such that a Local Union cannot voice its position with resolutions or in their local publications, then we feel it is high time the International Constitution be changed so that such will be permitted...Shall we retain our local autonomy or are we just a dues-collecting agency?

(Dec. 15, 1949, p.3)

In 1949, the International leadership recommended that the rank and file vote in favor of the Union Shop during the upcoming election. Articles like "Union Shop Vote: Chevrolet Local Aims for 100% Union Shop"

appeared in the paper listing 21 reasons why members should vote for the union shop, quoting from a General Motors Department publication. (Dec. 29, 1949)

In the January 26, 1950 issue, a rebuttal was printed titled "21 Or Bust." (27) In it the writer listed 21 questions and their answers warning of the consequences of voting for the "Taft Hartley Union Shop." Among the objections he listed were:

1. Is the Union Shop something new in the Chevrolet? Certainly not, the management gave you one in the '30's. Brought your membership cards to you in person and let you vote for representation on their own line. Homer Martin, in his heyday, tried to sell you one to offset any opposition.
2. Will the Taft Hartley Union make our union stronger? In numbers, yes, economically no, because all the power will drift to the top. Management and Union boys will get married so to speak, and quit their clandestine courtship....
6. Why do the top Union officials want a Union Shop under this plan? Because it is the easiest way out and it will become an automatic union where the boss will not only collect the dues but do the organizing, too, and you'll never know you have a union only when you see the deductions on the pay stubs....
11. How does labor history show that union and closed shops were gained? Not by the politicians paternalism, nor by the bosses' bountiful goodness, but by hard-fought years of class struggle. Not by collaboration and collusion.

The writer of "21 or Bust", realizing that he was bucking the tide in putting forward these sentiments appealed to his readers to give him a fair hear: "So my fellow union workers, in voicing my personal experiences, observations and beliefs in opposition to this crucial question, I am only asking you to bear in mind that there is always two sides to any issue and both should be heard without any malice or mayhem, without fear or favor. Let the truth be found in the balance of reason. That's democracy...."(Jan. 26, 1950, p.1)

The publication of "21 Or Bust" was met with both praise and condemnation. One article, "Do We Want a Union" by Bert Boone defended the author of "21 Or Bust" writing:

Certainly every worker with one bit of human morality wants a Union. A GENUINE ONE, TOO! However, militant union people prefer to build a union and not secure one thorough paternalism as seems to be the pattern of the shroud that had been cut for our union today....The writer of '21 or Bust' expressed my sentiments 100 per cent. I am in favor of every worker joining the union through the program of the workers and not the employer....Beware of a gift from the boss.

(Feb. 23, 1950, p.4)

Another article, appearing in the column "State of the Union," explained that the writer had only recently come to agree with "21 Or Bust." In this article "Chiselers and Pork Choppers Attempt to Raise Dues", the columnist explained:

Some time ago during the Union Shop

election, a brother...pointed out that once we got a Union Shop we would become goats for the unscrupulous leadership to exploit as they pleased. I disagreed then, but now in view of the twelve dollar assessment we just paid and the proposed dues increase, I'm beginning to wonder if maybe the brother wasn't right.

(Sept. 7, 1950, p.1)

Condemnation of "21 Or Bust" appeared immediately. For example, in an article called "I Don't like It" (Feb. 9, 1950), the writer argued:

That piece in the union paper ["21 Or Bust" - ed]...said we shouldn't vote for the Union Shop sure made me mad.... I think everyone should be made to join the union, even if they don't believe in it. We should make them pay their way.

In response to these condemnations, Coburn Walker in his President's column, reviewed the anti-censorship policy of The Searchlight which had been passed by the membership in 1948. He wrote:

As President of the Local and ex-officio member of the Publicity Committee, I feel that unwarranted attacks have been made on the Publicity Committee by a certain group within the Local for having permitted Brother...the right to voice his views on the Union Shop.

(Oct. 19, 1950)

Walker then referred to the anti-censorship resolution passed September 12,

1948, which in part reads:

Whereas: Chevrolet Local 659 maintains a paper published twice monthly for the express purpose of the exchange of ideas and thoughts of said members; and

Whereas; The membership of Local 659 has on numerous occasions defined the duties of The Searchlight staff as being EDITORS and NOT CENSORS and to reject only those articles that are libelous or not in good taste, and UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES WERE THEY TO REJECT ARTICLES MERELY BECAUSE THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED DID NOT COINCIDE WITH THEIR OWN.

(Oct. 19, 1950)

But it was not just the "certain group within the local" referred to by Coburn Walker, who were disturbed about the publication policy of The Searchlight. In response to the article "Chiselers and Pork Choppers Attempt to Raise Dues" which had appeared in the Sept. 7, 1950 issue of The Searchlight, one of the officers of the International Union wrote a response printed in the October 19, 1950 issue of The Searchlight. He complained:

Although the author of this scurrilous article didn't have the courage to use my name it is quite obvious that the union officer he had reference to was me....I resent being called a "Chiseler and pork chopper."

The "State of the Union" columnist retorted:

I did not and do not lack the courage

to use the...name. The truth is that I was referring to statements made by some of his "Yes Men" of the FDR-CIO Labor School in Port Huron. However, if...[the-ed] foot fits the shoe, I have no objection to his claiming the title of "Chiseler and Pork Chopper." (Oct. 19, 1950, p.1)

The columnist then went on to call in question the various expenses of the International Union pointing out that the purported rationale for the dues increase was to build up a \$25 million strike fund to 'prevent as many strikes as possible' but that the recently signed 5 year contract in fact ruled out strikes for the foreseeable future.

In 1950, the International leadership had sent out a letter to local newspaper editors informing them that an international union publications board would review their publications for possible libel and conformity with international policy. (29) On the morning of December 12, 1950, at 8:30 a.m. a telegram addressed to Coburn Walker, President, was delivered to the local's office. The telegram read:

The International Executive Board is requesting that you appear before it on Wednesday, December 13, 1950, at 4 p.m., room 808, Book Cadillac Hotel, Detroit, Mich., to show cause why the policies and stories carried in the "Searchlight", publication of 659 are in violation of the policies of the International Union, UAW-CIO. (Dec. 14, 1950, p. 1)

The telegram was signed "By Order of

the International Executive Board."

When Local 659's officers and The Searchlight's Editorial Board appeared as requested, they were told that the International Executive Board had reviewed issues of the newspaper from October, 1949 to November, 1950 and had found the content of the newspaper to be "anti-union."

The local was ordered to change the editorial policy of the newspaper and to print a copy of the International's condemnations in The Searchlight.

The Executive Board's statement to be printed in The Searchlight said in part:

Specifically, the "Searchlight" has consistently been in violation of UAW-CIO policy in that (a) it made repeated attempts to sabotage and weaken the Union's campaign for a union shop in General Motors, and (b) in attempts to sabotage collection of emergency strike assistance which had been approved by an overwhelming majority of the Convention, and (c) in many other cases too numerous to mention...The Board has further ordered the officers of Local 659 to cease and desist publication of material which, by impartial judgment, would be anti-union in character.

The Officers of Local 659 are also asked by the Board to make every attempt to eliminate false, misleading and biased material from the 'Searchlight'; and to include, wherever reasonable or possible, points of view which differ from those of the local Officers or editors of the 'Search-

Telegram from Detroit, Mich. Received at 8:50 a.m., Dec. 12, 1950.

WESTERN UNION

CLASS OF SERVICE
This is a special service. It is subject to change without notice. It is subject to change without notice. It is subject to change without notice.

STANDARD
This is a standard service. It is subject to change without notice. It is subject to change without notice. It is subject to change without notice.

COBURN S. WALKER, PRESIDENT

The International Executive Board is requesting that you appear before it on Wednesday, December 13, 1950, at 4 p.m., room 808, Book Cadillac Hotel, Detroit, Mich., to show cause why the policies and stories carried in the "Searchlight" publication of 659, are in violation of the policies of the International Union, UAW-CIO.

Signed: **EMIL MAZEY, Secretary-Treasurer, UAW-CIO**
By Order of the International Executive Board

light'.

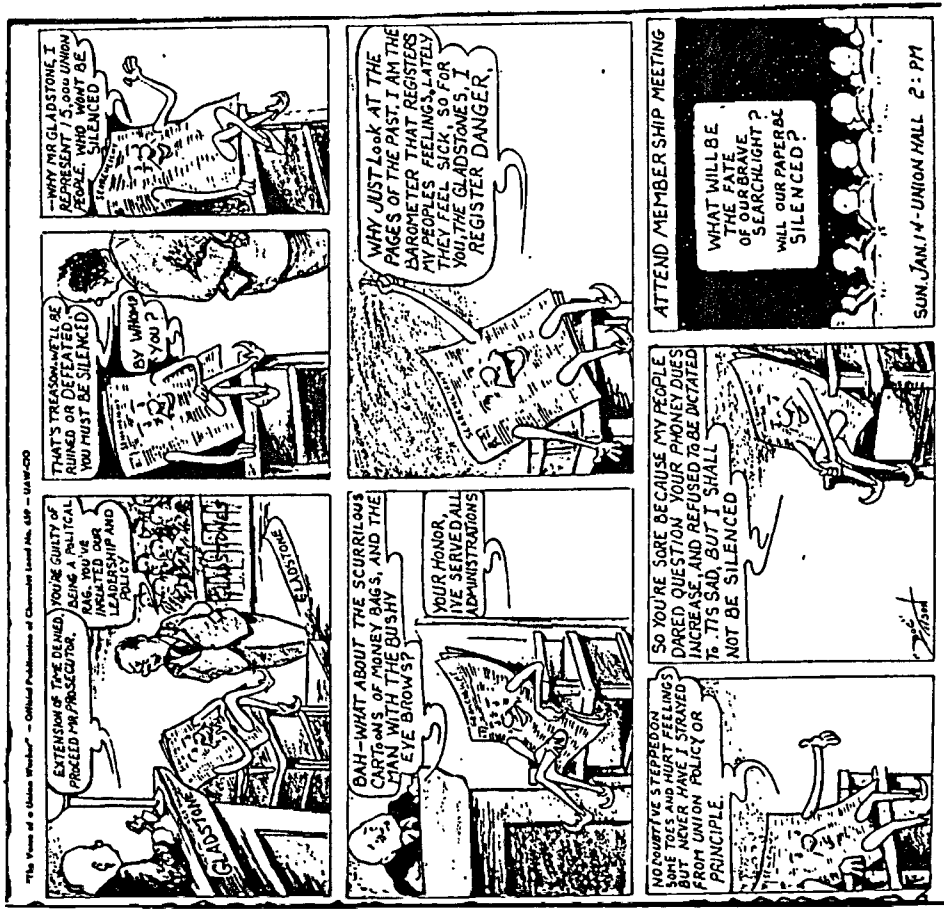
The Board specifically stated that nothing in its action should be construed to limit or impair in any way the right of the membership, the local officers, or the 'Searchlight' to criticize, differ or oppose.

(Dec. 28, 1950, p.1)

After reviewing the International Executive Board's condemnation of their newspaper, Local 659 filed a grievance to be heard at the U.A.W. Convention in April, 1951. They prepared a defense, citing the U.A.W. Constitution precedents on freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and local autonomy.

During this period, The Searchlight's pages carried rank and file expressions of consternation and opposition to the interference with their newspaper. One article compared the actions of the International Executive Board with those of Hitler. The article called "What Do YOU Want?" said:

The enemies of "The Searchlight" Editorial Staff have been laying down a continual barrage of words by which they expect to conceal their real intentions. In spite of all their fog and mist of words, they have not been able to obscure the real issues, which is: [Will - ed] 'The Searchlight' be able to continue its policy of free and open discussion, or will it forget those things and devote its pages to Walter Reuther and the International Executive Board?



Some people are going to a lot of trouble to peddle the propaganda that criticism of those in office is wrong -- that we should do just as we are told and not complain about it. That maybe things aren't perfect now but they will somehow or other get much better. That criticism of Reuther and the Executive Board will create disunity and disruption and is therefore to be considered as Union treason....

This is just the same line of baloney that Hitler sold to the German people; that above all they should not beef or gripe about those who are in positions of authority.... The first thing he did when he came in power was take away the right of free speech, free press, and adjustment of grievances where the people might register a complaint. (Dec. 28, 1950, p.2)

Another contribution to the paper, defended in verse the constructive role played by criticism:

Sometimes I pan the Company
Their Supervision too
I also pan our Local, But,
Right now I'm panning you
Please tell me Mr. Reuther
'Bout the freedom of the press
But that must be for other folks
And not for us I guess
...
The contract may be very good
But do you think it fair
Altho' there's points that I dislike
My gripes I cannot air?

After two other verses, the poet ended his refrain:

And now I'll end this little rhyme
But tell me if you can
When a little criticism
Ever hurt an honest man.
(Dec. 28, 1950, p.2)

The article "Labor Fakirs Protect Interest of Capitalism!" was also printed in the December 28, 1950 issue of The Searchlight. It proposed an economic analysis of the International Union leadership. The article explained:

It has become a problem of the industrial employing class to create a buffer class at the economic boundary between itself and [the -ed] industrial working class. This problem is well on its way to a solution which is contained in the development of the leadership, officialdom and bureaucracy of the conservative labor organizations

....
These labor fakirs develop a vested interest in perverted authoritarian 'Unionism'. Like any exploiting class, they find it necessary to build special organizational machinery within unions to serve their interests. This is manifested by cliques, machines, undercover operators, stool-pigeons, hatchet men, and goon squads.

Added to the direct corruptive influence of this kind of 'Unionism' is the attraction it offers to the worst types of opportunists, crum-seekers, and working class traitors.

To the workers, these imposters, brazenly or with hypocritical modesty as the circumstances require, credit themselves with being fighters in the class struggles...with being necessary for the conduct of future struggles. On this basis they justify their fat salaries and tenures of offices....

Workers must abolish the buffer class within Unions. Meaning the abolition of the reasons for the existence for this buffer class.

The article offered the following recommendations to deal with the problem it had outlined:

The rates of pay of all officials must be kept equal to or below the average wage rate of the workers they represent.

The source of all authority within the Union must come from the exercise of the workers. 'Authority must not be delegated.'

Nothing more than function should be delegated.

Function should be delegated only to members subject to recall at all times; whose activities are subject to open scrutiny by other functionaries and by membership generally; who must make detailed reports at frequent intervals to the membership to whom they are responsible. Tenure of office must be short.

The article ends with the call for the

membership to take control of the union.

A membership meeting of Local 659, attended by an "overflow crowd" protested the International Executive Board's actions, and a petition was circulated and signed. Other criticisms -- cartoons, articles and letters make up the pages of The Searchlight up to the April, 1951 International Union Convention.

One letter was written by Ed Cronck, a rank and file leader of the 1936-37 Sit-Down. Titled "Honest Criticism Hurts No One", the article reviewed the history of the Reuther brothers. The writer addressed Walter Reuther with an indictment:

Do you remember how you and your brothers used to tell us...how every local should have its own Local autonomy, and their own Local paper?
(March 8, 1951)

The letter goes on to defend local trade union autonomy.

I believe that we who work in the plants have a right to our Local. That is the only way we have to tell you when we think you are wrong. Do you remember Walt, when you told us that no officer of our Union should stay out of the plant over 2 years because he forgets all about the worker in the plant? You should go back in the plant and run for Committeeman so you could find out what you and your friends gave us in the G.M. Contract to bargain with. I think that you would leave the country, you would be so ashamed of yourself...I believe you have given away everything

that we ever did have on the bargaining.

(March 8, 1951)

Other letters published in The Searchlight during this period helped to clarify what the rank and file felt was at stake in the fight. One said:

Under the five year contract we are not supposed to have to worry about keeping the union organized and should be able to spend out [sic] time in educating and organizing our membership.

What's been done? The contract is almost a year old and instead of the International coming out with a large educational program which they should be able to afford in view of the facts that the Union Shop and Dues Checkoff should enable them to cut way back in their organizing staff and direct the money saved there into building a stronger and more militant Union, ruled by the membership.

Instead it seems the five years is to be spent in building a political machine so strong that the little man will be unable to raise his voice in objection of any kind. Already this machine is responsible for the five year contract with its company security clauses which take away the only real bargaining power that the working man has (that is to strike if the Company won't bargain). The contract also contains the waiver clause which prevents the Union from bargaining on any unforeseeable condition that may develop in the five years.

Now, this machine wants to increase the dues to \$2.50 and to have the convention every four years and to have four-year election of officers. At that rate we won't have anything more than a dues collection agency, which we will pay high dues for the privilege of working in a sweat shop which is exactly what the Assembly Plant is and what the company is trying to do in its other plants.

(Feb. 22, 1951, p.3)

Not only were letters from members of Local 659 printed, but The Searchlight also received and printed letters from other UAW locals supporting the fight and asking for copies of the newspaper to distribute in their areas. For example, from Chicago:

The story of your fight for Local Union autonomy and free expression has recently been brought to my attention. It is for this reason that I am taking this opportunity to express my admiration, respect and agreement with your position...Under Reuther opposition of a genuine nature is 'verboden'. Much of the rank and file knows that everything is run from the top down and feel that protests are of no avail.... Our union must be restored to its previous course of rank and file control.
(Feb. 22, 1951, p.4)

And from Local 742, UAW-CIO:

I would be interested in distributing 500 copies of your January 25 issue, or any further issues exposing censorship of your splendid paper.

I am certain that the story of the attempt to abridge your right of free press would arouse support for your efforts among the membership of my Local, Local 742, UAW-CIO.
(Feb. 22, 1951)

In April, 1951, the UAW convention convened in Cleveland. Article 28, Section 8 of the UAW Constitution was used to justify the International's suppression of The Searchlight:

Local publications shall conform with the policies of the International Union.

An editorial from Ford Facts reprinted in the April 19, 1951 issue of The Searchlight describes what happened at the convention:

One of the most serious things that took place at the UAW convention in Cleveland last week was something which received little notice in the newspapers We are referring to the action of the convention in its condemnation of the "Searchlight"....

In this particular instance our leaders have chosen to interpret any criticism of themselves or their ideas as being in violation of Article 28, Section 8. This, they apparently think, gives them a license to muzzle any publication which has the temerity to question the wisdom of their program or policies.... The 'Searchlight' was spanked by Reuther's convention and the majority of the delegates faithfully obeyed their master by granting the

International Union the authority to crack down on any local union publication that does not follow union policy -- as determined by Reuther... and Company.

The Searchlight had lost the battle at the convention, but it continued the fight locally. Its resistance had been far from extinguished. In its pages it continued to defend local autonomy and an uncensored local union press.

The skirmishes with the International and the struggle of The Searchlight to repeal the suppression continued for a number of years. In July, 1951, issues of The Searchlight were barred from the CIO School. (See The Searchlight, July 12, 1951.) In 1952, a resolution was passed by the membership of Local 659 welcoming rank and file criticism of union officers. It read in part:

be it further

RESOLVED: Any member of this Local may submit articles criticizing or acclaiming any officer on the conduct of his office.

(Jan. 24, 1952, p.1)

In reading through The Searchlight after 1951, there are periods of lively debate and then periods of only praise for the International. In 1954 the International put Local 659 into receivership and 14 members were brought to trial on charges, some for articles published in The Searchlight. (31)

In 1956, The Searchlight was again criticized for having violated the Interna-

tional's publication policy and a representative from the International's Public Relations Department "was appointed to examine all future articles before publication in order to eliminate anti-union material." (32) Once again, the mandate used by the International Union to justify this censorship was that of the 1951 convention.

In 1957, Carl Johnson's column hailed the lifting of the most recent censorship, elaborating on the need for the newspaper by the rank and file:

The release of the Searchlight should be hailed by the "Rank and File," as a rebirth of Democracy, not only to protect it from the racketeers and Bureaucracy, but to give the ranks an opportunity to express their opinions and aspirations politically. I say politically, because unionism alone though absolutely essential to avoid industrial slavery, cannot fulfill the needs of labor in an ever increasing capitalist monopoly system, which exists only by wars and production of armaments and increasing national debt.

(Sept. 12, 1957, p. 2)

Despite these efforts, by the early 1960s, articles critical of the policies of the International Union, or raising the broad issues confronting the labor movement appeared less and less frequently.

The battle had been fought for years, but as Jack Stieber notes in his book Governing the UAW, by the early 1960's, "Controlled articles of any kind are notable by their absence," (33) not only in The Searchlight, but in other UAW papers as well.

But even in the 1960's a way was found to carry on The Searchlight tradition. Articles were written summarizing the great gains that had been won by the UAW pioneers. "Each generation," wrote one of Flint's labor pioneers, "has to solve its own problems. The sit-down generation solved the problem of organization. The postwar generation solved the problem of pensions and inflation. Not entirely, but a good start was begun." (April 21, 1960, p.2) He might well have added that it was in fact the forum provided by The Searchlight that made it possible for the post war generation, as he calls it, to sort out and build the necessary theoretical clarity and organizational solidarity to win increased wages, COLA, pension and insurance gains.

This writer, in his article, acknowledges though, that there are certain outstanding problems that were not solved by his generation. "The present generation," he says, "is faced with the greatest problems of all. They are Automation, Peace and Politics." (Ibid.)

The rank and file, in general, lost access to the rich variety of polemic and criticism that had been published in The Searchlight while it was "The Voice of the Chevrolet Worker." But one letter to the editor, published in the heat of the struggle against censorship summarized the lesson that the writer had drawn from the experience:

Brother, that is a gloomy picture, so I'll tell you the one thing in our favor. We, the workers, have a better understanding of these forces now at work and the forewarned are forearmed.
(Feb. 21, 1951, p.2)

And gradually, through the years, a tradition sprang up, alive to the present, that in one issue a year (at least, occasionally in more), in the issue falling closest to February 11, the anniversary of the victory of the Flint Sit Down of 1936-37, the pages of The Searchlight are opened up to columns from the pioneers from Flint's labor battles, and they are allowed to comment on and criticize the current UAW leadership as a commemoration of the rich and ongoing struggle of the auto workers.

A professor at the Harvard Business School, in an article in the Harvard Business Review called "Why History Matters to Managers" explains the importance of this Feb. 11 commemoration of the Flint Sit Down Strike in labor newspapers like The Searchlight. He acknowledges:

It is important for our students to know something about...the [General Motors] Flint Strike in Michigan in 1936-37. Why?...For many years, UAW journals and magazines commemorated it and carried accounts of the celebrations and speeches with which the unions have kept the memory of the strike alive. It is terribly important for our students to know this kind of stuff because they are going to have to deal with the heritage of disrespect that has grown up between unions and management.

(HBR, Jan. Feb. 1985, p. 82)

The Searchlight, while it was the "Voice of the Chevrolet Worker" was part of the continuation of the "heritage of disrespect"

of the sit-downers, by which they criticized and debated the policies and practices of their union, and thus continued their fight against management.

One editor of The Searchlight during the fight against censorship, summarized the role the newspaper had played in the building of the UAW. He wrote:

Our paper, the Searchlight has been instrumental in building and maintaining this great Local 659, ...commonly known as the father of the UAW....From the grassroots of our organization or the floor of the production lines and Machine Dept. came the private peevish or inequalities that were being perpetuated on our people. This privilege MUST be maintained....From the "grass roots" of our organization came the contract changes including the Escalator Clause, which was cussed at, later adopted, cussed at and readopted, which is proof positive that we are not always wrong.

I ask you, the membership, this pertinent question: Should your paper the SEARCHLIGHT be permitted to voice this disapproval of portions of the PENSION and five year plan or must we call it the answer to a 'maiden's prayer' until May, 1955 and then ask G.M. for a better one....Preserve your hard won HERITAGE the Searchlight.

(Jan. 25, 1951)

Thus, the story of The Searchlight is a very important story which helps to explain the seeds that gave birth to the U.A.W., and it was the U.A.W. that helped to nurture the

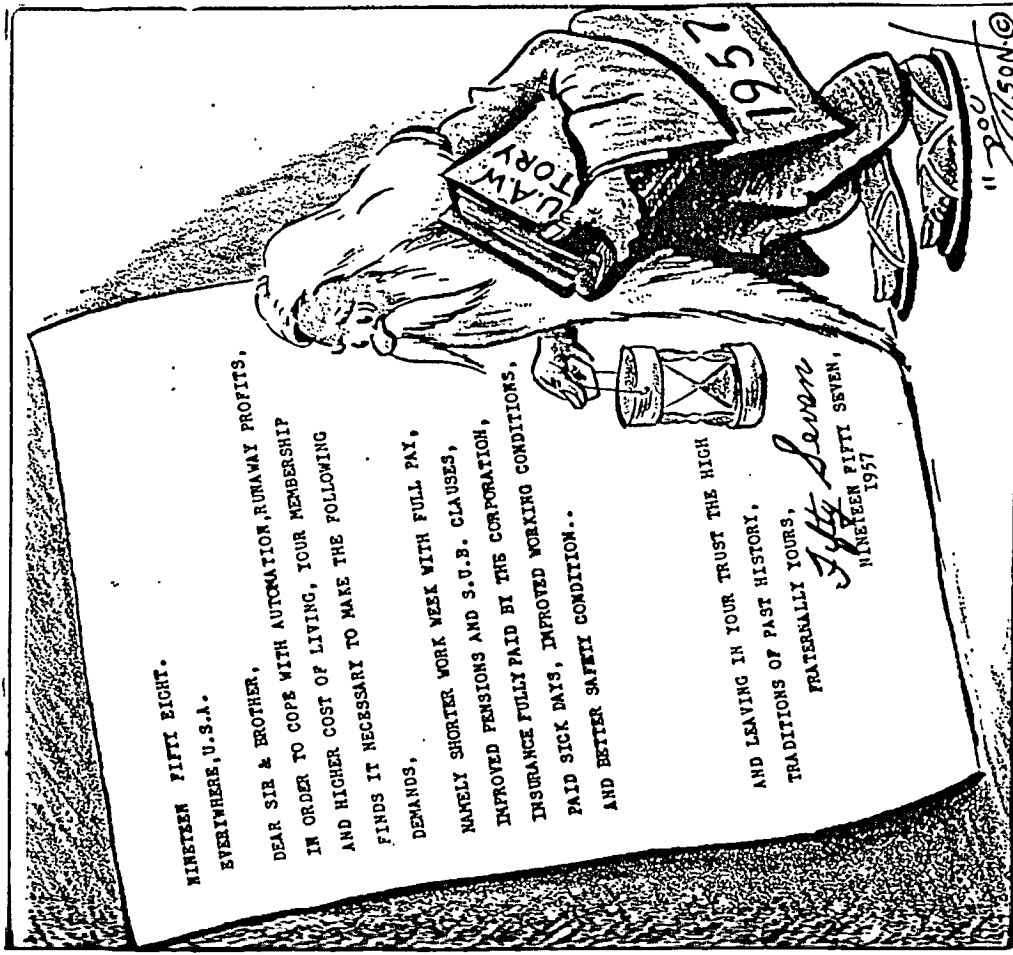
growth and development of industrial unionism in the U.S. On the occasion of his retirement, another of the pioneers of Local 659 involved in the struggles from the early days of the union, stressed the importance of the younger generation of workers studying the rich history of struggle of the Flint pioneers. He wrote:

Our younger workers who are just entering industrial employment and union membership must be encouraged to study labor history, and they must learn how to avoid the tragic errors of my generation and they must enlarge upon and profit from our triumphs.....

Just as those of my generation stood on the shoulders of Big Bill Haywood, of the Haymarket Square Martyrs, of Eugene V. Debs and John L. Lewis, so will those of the present generation of workers stand on our shoulders and they provide the impetus for tomorrow's progress, security and happiness.

(Oct. 21, 1971, p.4)

The early Searchlight, as "the Voice of the Chevrolet Worker," provides those strong shoulders.



FOOTNOTES

1. Old issues of labor newspapers are difficult to locate. The author would like to thank the Labadie Room at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and the Flint Public Library for the service they provide making scarce labor materials like old issues of The Searchlight available to the public. Many people have donated the things they have saved for years to the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University. Sadly, this repository makes research very difficult and has either claimed it couldn't locate material it is listed as having or disposed of precious materials on the excuse that they are duplications.

2. For several years the author was unable to locate any issues of The Searchlight before 1944. After asking at the Archives at Wayne State and being told they didn't have any, one pioneer let me know that he had donated a whole set of newspapers from 1943-44. Fortunately he was still alive and so I did eventually see the issues he referred to, but only after several years of having their existence denied. There are indications that The Searchlight began in 1942.

3. The Searchlight is still the title of the newspaper put out by Local 659 (UAW-Flint), but the masthead title has been changed. "The Voice of the Chevrolet Worker" was the title on the masthead during much of the period referred to in this text. In conversation with one of the original founders of the newspaper, the significance of the masthead title was discussed. "The Voice of the Chevrolet Worker" was chosen to signify that the newspaper was not to become a political

mouthpiece or the voice of incumbency, but the product of collaboration at the work level. During a brief period discussed in the text, from September 22, 1949 to January 24, 1952, the newspaper was subtitled "The Voice of a Union Worker."

4. When it was started in 1942, The Searchlight was part of a trend of local union newspapers. But by 1946, Carl Johnson, a rank and file columnist in The Searchlight, commented that he knew of "not over half a dozen union papers in the U.S." at the time which allowed the free discussion contained in The Searchlight and that he himself "had personally seen only one other out of a great many examined." (May 9, 1946, p.8)

5. Some of the columns which appeared over a period of time included: "News from Poverty Flats," "Only More Democracy Can Save Democracy," "A Laborer Looks at Life," "Winning for the Union," "State of the Union." Contributors like Bert Boone wrote frequently but not as part of a column until he retired. Articles from the ranks of the Chevrolet workers were printed either signed, unsigned, or sometimes with pen names. Writers represented a great range of political persuasions. There were Wobblies, Socialist Party leaning Socialists, Communist Party sympathizers, supporters of Trotskyite groups, Christian Socialists, and Democratic party activists who, despite their different leanings, were able to work together and contribute to the struggles of the day. Also the union president often had a column where the policies of the International union leaders were debated and criticized.

6. One such letter to the editor published in the August 2, 1945 issue complained:

Different people, all members of Local 659 have told me about submitting articles for publication to find that their time had been wasted in writing. Some have said that the editor even promised that he'd publish their articles and then experienced disappointment because his boss ... (the president of the Local - ed) wouldn't allow publication because it didn't meet with his approval.

What does the Mast Head state on the Searchlight? It says quote -- 'The Voice of the Chevrolet Worker' end quote. Now would you say that any such discriminatory censorship is the real voice of the Chevrolet worker? I don't. (August 2, 1945, p.6)

Also see the article "Constructive Criticism of Searchlight's Policy" June 21, 1945, p.6

7. At war's end, Flint's automobile union reflected the fundamentally conservative consciousness of its constituents. Still militant over bread and butter issues...Flint's workers accepted an industrial union in which policy was formulated at the top and discipline was deemed more necessary than rank-and-file control. This kind of automobile unionism...was not simply imposed on workers from above.

(from "Union Organizing in the Automobile Industries" by Ronald Edsforth, printed in The Searchlight, Feb. 6, 1981, p.19)

8. A eulogy published in The Searchlight on June 5, 1958, called Johnson "one of the early founders of our industrial union movement." (p.3) He had worked in the old AFL Auto Workers Federal Union and then in 1933-36 had helped organize The League for Industrial Democracy in Flint. The educational lectures sponsored by the League and attended by 200-500 people helped to lay "the groundwork in Flint for the organization of the CIO." Johnson then went on to take part in "secret moves" to organize industrial unions sponsored by the U.M.W. Carl Johnson's son Kermit Johnson as one of the rank and file leaders of the Flint SitDown Strike was one of the most important strategists of the strike.

9. In the December 9, 1948 issue, Johnson explained what he meant by the name of his column. He wrote: "In conclusion, I am convinced...that only the more democracy, which is Socialism, can save democracy."

10. From here on, references to The Searchlight will be indicated by date and page number. An Appendix starting on page 57 contains the names of authors cited.

11. Also see "A Program to Answer Inflation," Jan. 15, 1948, p.1.

12. Irving Howe and B.J. Widick, The U.A.W. and Walter Reuther, (Random House, 1949), p.133. Also see Fred J. Cook, Walter Reuther, (Chicago, 1963), p.147, and "How to Raise Wages Without Increasing Prices," Walter Reuther, U.A.W. pamphlet, 1946.

13. See The Searchlight, February 12, 1948 for the International union leadership's criticism of the escalator clause. The radio

talk in support of the escalator clause was aired on Tuesday, January 20, 1948 and was printed in The Searchlight, January 29, 1948.

14. See Frank Cormier and William J. Eaton, Reuther, (N. J., 1979), p.292-293. Victor G. Reuther, The Brothers Reuther, (Boston, 1979), p.306, and Howe and Widick, p.177-178.

15. "Hi, Mac," November 6, 1947, p. 2.

16. Not only was this letter critical of war, but also of the way the Allies were handling the war. The writer explained:

The German army was falling apart. Those guys were surrendering by the hundreds because they had a bellyful of Hitler and all he stands for. Then the Allies started telling them what was going to happen to them when they were victorious, so the poor devils began to figure. Well, Hell, we're going to catch it worse if we give up. It looks like we'll have to keep on fighting. Anything's better than what the Allies are threatening us with. And God knows how many lives have been lost as a result of this policy of the men who told us of the "Four Freedoms." But they tell us about peace on earth!

The Greek people had the nerve to want to decide what form of government they should have, so Churchill's General Scobie systematically began annihilating them with artillery, tanks and airplanes. (That you and Dad help to build.) "Good will toward men!" (January 4, 1945, p.2)

I include this additional quote to show some of the range and depth of critical analysis that was carried in The Searchlight even during the war.

17. The Wobblies called a worker who defended capitalism "a scissorbill," or as Bert Boone put it, "A scissorbill is a worker who is a capitalist from his ears up and a worker from his ears down." (March 23, 1950)

18. The article "Gremlins Vote Elects Grablins 868 Unregistered Votes Prove There Was Something In the Woodpile Besides Wood," describes the irregularities in the election:

The voting across the river on Chevrolet Ave. had been very light up to 1:00 p.m. on the second day's voting, when the observer judging from previous elections that but few voters would cast their ballots until after 2:00 p.m. when second shift workers began to dribble in, went to lunch.

Lo and behold, when he returned about an hour and a quarter later the count had jumped to more than 1600....Remember this, the membership books were examined by a firm of Certified Public Accountants and they found that there was a discrepancy of 868 votes between the number of voters registered and the number of ballots found in the ballot box..

(March 15, 1945, p.2)

19. When he died, one union brother wrote of Bert Boone:

The progress of society is always built

upon the sacrifices, blood and bones of those progressive militants who proceed us. The contributions by Bert which elevated workers to full stature as humans are like steel bands which bind and reinforce the foundations laid by Parsons and Mooney, by Debs and Haywood, by Lewis and Hillman, and by the host of heroic labor pioneers of other eras.

(April 17, 1969, p.4)

20. A letter published in The Searchlight described Bert Boone's performance as president of the local:

Local 659 was six years old last March. Out of all those years we've had one president that cooperated with all local union committees during the life of Local 659. He was Bert Boone. At no time have I ever heard anyone accuse him of trying to undermine any committee. Any business brought to his attention was promptly and properly referred to the committee handling said business or problem. That is what the head of any institution should do.... Such leadership was unknown before Boone's tenure of office and it isn't being done now.

(August 2, 1945)

21. His column appeared 'off and on', because sometimes it was suppressed, as he notes in a column that was published in March 4, 1954: "May I first of all thank you for informing me that I may once again pollute the pages of your esteemed publication with my opinions which for the past years have been deemed too radical for consumption by my fellow members of the proletariat."

22. Obituaries written October 12, 1954, when he died, show the great respect he received from fellow union members. One said, "George liked to trust his fellow man as we all do, but his honesty and integrity wouldn't permit him to tolerate betrayal. That is one of the highest tributes possible to pay anyone." A second eulogy said:

Not only is it a loss for us here at Chevrolet, it is a great loss to the whole labor movement, for the 'Old Rebel' was to the Union what Dempsey was to the fighting game or Babe Ruth to baseball. What Roosevelt was to the Democratic Party or Taft to the Republican. He was MR. UNION MAN. There was none better before and there will never be another.

He was liked and respected by all union men and hated and feared by all fakers and scissorbills. His principles were, never give a rat a break.

23. A number of articles and letters appeared in The Searchlight over the years praising George Carroll as editor. One such letter said:

The Searchlight is or was at one time an important function of Local 659. George Carroll, the former editor, was elected when the paper was established and re-elected the two succeeding years making a total of three years he served as editor of the Searchlight, and he served well. He had real qualifications and was as impartial as was humanly possible to be.

Look at the Searchlight now. It

hasn't any punch at all. There isn't any shop news to speak of. I've seen the time that two full pages wouldn't hold the shop news. Further, anyone submitting an article for publication need only be a union member in good standing. Whether the editor agreed with it or not made no difference. But one thing sure, it would be published. You can't say that for the present editor.

(August 2, 1945)

24. There isn't room in this article to examine and give samples from the many other principled positions worked out and debated in The Searchlight on a number of difficult questions confronting the workers movement during this period.

25. See text of Ford Pension Plan, November 3, 1949, p.2 and "Resolution on Ford Pension Plan," October 20, 1949, p.3.

26. A column written by the "Buster Reporter" appeared in The Searchlight over a number of years describing fantastic trips and exploits of various Busters from the plant, and making comments and criticisms on the struggles of the day in the midst of poking fun at different people. The name "Buster" often preceeded the different people named in the column.

27. In retrospect, it is interesting to look back at the International union leadership's response to this article. Not only did they disagree with it, but they objected to the fact that it had ever been printed. For example, the Grievance Committee at the 1951 U.A.W. Convention especially cited this article as proof that The Searchlight was

guilty of attacking union policy. They said: Outstanding among those examples of anti-policy material contained in The Searchlight is an article...entitled "21 OR BUST", from UAW Convention Proceedings, 1951, p.345.

28. B.J. Widick, in Labor Today, (Boston, 1964) shows how debate over the efficacy for labor of the Taft Hartley union shop is still ongoing. He writes:

Labor leaders denounced the Taft Hartley Act of 1947 -- enacted under employer pressure to hamstring unions -- as the 'slave labor law'....The labor leaders failed to note, however, that the major effect of the new law, unintentional as it may have been, was to pave the way for making compulsory unionism a permanent feature of our industrial relations.

The sponsors of the Taft Hartley law hoped and believed that the provision for free secret elections under NLRB auspices before a union shop could be granted would free workers from unions and might even abolish unions....Compulsion entered the picture once the majority had voted to make union membership a condition of employment; the minority who rejected the union shop were bound by the decision.

With mandatory union membership, the issue of individual freedom and the rights of the workers becomes more acute and troublesome. (p. 72)

29. This review of The Searchlight by the International union leadership was reminiscent of a similar review under-

taken by former U.A.W. President Homer Martin during his attempts to defeat his opposition in 1937. Martin had introduced a resolution at the International Convention proposing to eliminate the publication of local newspapers on the grounds that the International was "legally responsible for statements made in them." (Skeels, J.W., "Development of Political Stability within the UAW Unions," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Economics, University of Wisconsin, 1957, p.58-59) The resolution was defeated by delegates at the convention, but in January, 1938, a similar motion abolishing local papers was passed by Martin's Executive Board. Through the successful struggle to topple Martin, the right to publish local papers was restored. See also Skeels, p.320 and Labor Action, January 29, 1951.

30. The following is a summary taken from Skeels of the findings of the convention:

On the first charge, that of printing anti-union material, the convention grievance committee found that the local newspaper, the Searchlight had attacked the Reuther negotiated 1950 contract with General Motors which was to run for five years (sample headline: THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN, RUSSIA OR AMERICA, 250,000 WORKERS GET FIVE YEARS OF HARD LABOR) also attacked the 1949 Ford agreement when the membership was in the process of ratifying it, attacked the international union leaders (sample headline: STATE OF THE UNION, Chiselers and Pork Choppers Attempt to Raise

Dues), and finally attacked union policy matters by printing a criticism of the union shop at a time that the General Motors department was trying to muster support for it. On the basis of these charges, the convention grievance committee contended that the local had violated the section of the constitution which stated 'Local union publications shall conform with the policies of the International union.'
(p. 318-319)

31. See United Auto Worker, May 29, 1954, The Searchlight, April 15, 1954 and April 30, 1954.

32. Jack Stieber, Governing the UAW, (New York, 1967), p.143.

33. Stieber, p.143. For example, the publication of The Searchlight was suspended April 5, 1956, and reversed May 6, 1956. For an account see The Searchlight, May 10, 1956.

34. See especially The Searchlight, February 2, 1962 and The Searchlight, February 5, 1976.

APPENDIX

Names of Authors of Articles Cited in Text

- Carl Johnson, "Only More Democracy Can Save Democracy," October 29, 1949.
- Dorothy Stolpin, "Local Union Conference," December 21, 1944, p.1.
- Floyd Hoke-Miller, "A Laborer Looks at Life," January 15, 1948, p.7.
- Howard Foster, "Winning for the Union: Do Wages Determine Prices?", June 5, 1947, p.3.
- Don Chapman, "Election Statement: President-Elect Presents His Program," March 27, 1947, p.1.
- Howard Foster, "Winning for the Union: The People's Mandate," November 21, 1946, p.2.
- Dwight Stroh, "To End Wars Depressions," August 28, 1947, p. 3.
- Don Chapman, "Hi Mac," November 6, 1947, p.2.
- Carl Johnson, "Only More Democracy Can Solve Democracy: Addes and a Third Party," November 7, 1946, p.8.
- Bert Boone, "How Many Strikes Before You're Out," October 7, 1948, p.6.
- Floyd Hoke-Miller, "A New Year With Old Trim," January 15, 1948, p. 2.
- Anonymous, "Letter from Joe," January 4, 1945, p.1-2.

Bert Boone, "Open Letter to Ken Malone," November 15, 1951, p.4.

Floyd Hoke-Miller, "Of Wage Slaves and Caesars," June 14, 1951, p.2.

Sol Dollinger, "Fairwell to a Fighter," October 18, 1951, p.3.

Floyd Hoke-Miller, "The Curtain's Down," June 20, 1963, p.1.

James T. Cavell, "The Welfare State," December 15, 1949, p.2.

Carl Johnson, "Only More Democracy Can Save Democracy: Cavell Raises Debatable Questions," December 29, 1949, p.2.

James T. Cavell, "A Beautiful Theory But It Won't Work," March 9, 1950.

Bert Boone, "Who Produces Profits," March 23, 1950, p.2.

George Carroll, "Your Poverty Flat and Mine," April 6, 1950, p.3.

George Carroll, "Why I Am Resigning," March 5, 1945, p.1.

Coburn S. Walker, "The President's Column, Regional Director Reverses Position," December 1, 1949, p.3.

Shop News and Views in and around the Plants, November 3, 1949, p.3.

Sam Hill, "Officers and Members of Local 659," January 26, 1950, p.2.

Dallas Edwards, "Letter to Mr. Floyd Davenport," January 12, 1950, p.3.

Coburn Walker, "President's Column: An Open Letter to the Four Top Officers of the International Union," December 15, 1949, p.3.

Ken Malone, "21 Or Bust!," January 26, 1950, p.1.

Bert Boone, "Do We Want A Union," February 23, 1950, p.4.

John Eleazer, "State of the Union," September 7, 1950, p.1.

Earl Burgett, "I Didn't Like It," February 9, 1950, p.1.

Coburn Walker, "The President's Column: Criticism Not Warranted," February 9, 1950, p.1.

John Eleazer, Brother Eleazer Answers....", October 19, 1950, p.1.

Luther Crane, "What Do You Want?," December 28, 1950, p.2.

H.E. Darr, "Criticism Hurts No Man," December 28, 1950, p.2.

Ed. Cronck, "Honest Criticism Hurts No One," March 8, 1951, p.4.

Wm. T. Fitzgerald, "Assembly Plant: Hello Brother," February 22, 1951, p.3.

Norman C. Roth, "Just for the Record," February 22, 1951, p.4.

Oscar Rodes, "Local 742," February 22, 1951,

P.4.

Reprinted from Ford Facts, "Editorial," April 19, 1951, p.2.

Jack Palmer, "What Ails the Union Movement," April 21, 1960, p.2.

Wm. T. Fitzgerald, "Shop News and Views In and Around the Assembly Plant," February 22, 1951, p.2.

Dale Greene, January 26, 1951.

Larry Jones, "Till We Meet Again," October 21, 1971, p.4.

Floyd Davenport, "Is this Depression in the Midst of Prosperity: It's My Opinion," August 2, 1945, p.6.

Don Chapman, "Hi Mac," November 6, 1947, p.2.

Larry Jones, "Unionists Mourn Passing of Bert Boone," April 17, 1969, p.4.

Floyd Davenport, "Is this Depression....", August 2, 1945, p.6.

Bert Boone (Obituary on George Carroll), October 12, 1954.

Ken Malone, "George Carroll, First Editor of Searchlight, Passes Away," October 12, 1954.

Floyd Davenport, "Is this Depression....", August 2, 1945, p.6.

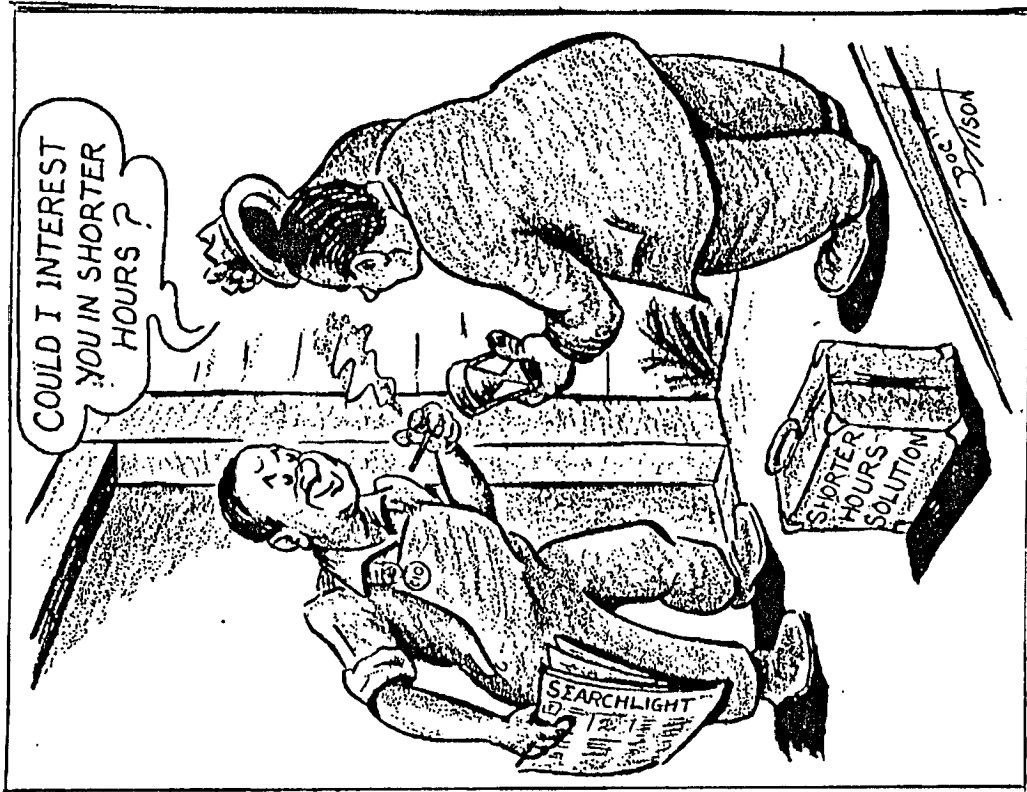
PAMPHLETS IN THE "SPIRIT OF '37"

1. A Laborer Looks at Life: Then and Now
From the Shop Floor by Floyd Hoke-
Miller

2. Tough Cookies: Pioneers of the Flint
Labor Press by Ronda Hauben

3. Holding the Fort: A Sit-Downers Diary
46 Days Inside Fisher No. 2 by a "Now
Disappeared Sit-Downer"

4. The Story of The Searchlight, the Voice of
The Chevrolet Worker by Ronda Hauben



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