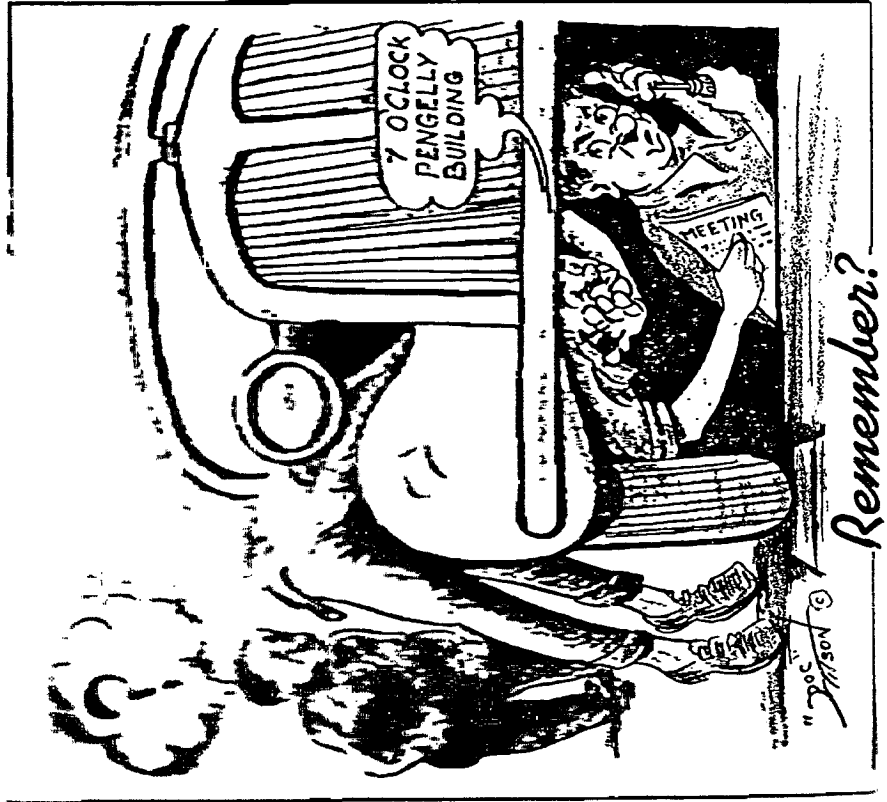


AMERICAN COMMUNICATING

# TOUGH COOKIES

PIONEERS OF

THE MINI LABOR PRESS



*Remember?*

Dedicated

to

the

TOUGH

COOKIES

who

forged

the

UAW

TOUGH COOKIES  
(With no apologies)  
BY FLOYD HOKE-MILLER

I asked a guy to tell me why  
The workers were labeled "Red,"  
By all the rags of sale-price tags,  
And this is what he said:

"You gotta be tough, you gotta be rough,  
You gotta have guts and gall,  
To work for wage this day and age  
When big shots own it all."

"You gotta be rude, you gotta be shrewd,  
You gotta have a gift for gab,  
To hold your own against the throne  
Of Old King Get by Grab."

"You gotta growl, you gotta howl,  
You gotta show your teeth,  
Because a slave is never brave  
When coward underneath."

"You gotta fight for what is right,  
As liberty's never free--  
For the iron-jail, the coat of mail  
Is held for you and me."

"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."

(Note: In a news release to the Detroit newspapers, the then head of Labor Relations for G.M. made this comment on the workers and the Flint labor situation: "They're tough cookies.")

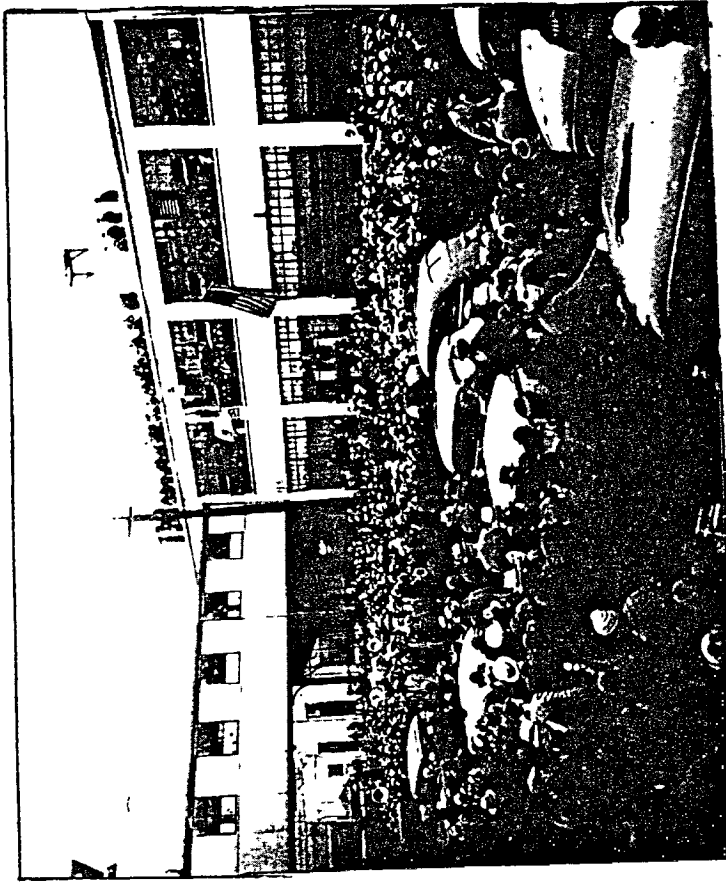


Photo from the collection of 'Doc' Wilson

## PROLOGUE

It matters not whether you consider this dualistic world of ours enigmatic or you profess to be a dialectical thinker and consider all things have an answer if you have the patience and capacity to search for it. I would in a sense call this prologue a Genesis with a legacy, as it does deal with the logic of cause and effect.

**TOUGH COOKIES** is a collection of articles by Ronda Hauben, illuminated by my poems, and illustrated by cartoons from the able pen of 'Doc' Wilson, a dedicated proletarian in the context of "then and now."

This booklet, that some may call Mother Goose doggerel, political gobbledegook or hazy hieroglyphics, in the order of contributors listed is not presented to please the ears or eyes of the critics in artforms who possibly do not know by experience the strenuous effort of industrial labor.

It is presented in a form whereby the working class can best understand its predicament. It deals with what has been done and what can yet be, that is to gain and to preserve a more equitable distribution of our Constitutional guarantee -- "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." At a disadvantage, we are now in a position of accepting what began as an exploiting enemy, to one of trust, explicitly: We have appointed him as business agent (collector of dues dollars), banker (depositee of escrow money), increasing his fiduciary soundness by administering billions of dollars and frozen funding in the form of fringe benefits.

I am glad to see and acknowledge the contributions of 'Doc' Wilson, my co-participant in the labor movement, and last but not least of Ronda Hauben, in Labor History and loyal worker in the field of the Common Cause. She did the foot-work, and the head-work, making possible this compilation of memories and ideas to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Congress of Industrial Organization and of its benefits to the proletarian labor movement.

In summation: let's not stay with the presently accepted fallacious procedure of playing "footsie" with the boss by inviting him to Black Lake<sup>2</sup>. Let's not remain docile or promise not to stampe on the Economic Royalists who feel that the rebel has no place in society since they inherited from the Robber Barons the belief that God has given them the right to rule.

May we be able to review in renewal, the first law of economic understanding:  
"For every dollar one has not earned, someone earned a dollar not received."

Floyd Hoke-Miller  
August, 1985

## Notes

1. A review by Joseph Matzuk in *The Flint Journal* (May 10, 1985 p.B28) characterized poems like "Tough Cookies" saying, "they fail, since the verse is doggerel which doesn't even rise to Edgar Guest level...."
2. UAW Educational Center

## INTRODUCTION

This month (August, 1985), the UAW is beginning the celebration of its 50th Anniversary. The celebration comes at a propitious time. The hostile climate currently facing labor is reminiscent of the long doldrums suffered in the 1920's. Technological change eliminating jobs, wage cuts, layoffs and so called employer-employee cooperation schemes were then the order of the day. The Collapse of Wall Street in 1929 and more than 13 million out of work by 1933 made it clear that something had to be changed. Many in the labor movement felt that the anti-labor climate could only be reversed if the unskilled workers in large scale industry were organized.

The automobile industry represented advanced technology. The large numbers of unskilled workers in auto made obvious the need for organization along industrial rather than the exclusive AFL craft lines.

In March, 1936, A.J. Muste, a labor organizer and educator wrote:

We have presented a concrete view of the financial structure of the automobile industry and its importance in the economic and social life of this country. Representatives of all shades of opinion are agreed that the question whether unionism can establish itself firmly in this industry is one of the dominant social issues of our day....  
(The Automobile Industry and Organized Labor, Baltimore, 1936)

Only reluctantly, the AFL allowed the auto workers to hold a founding convention, on Aug. 26, 1935, refusing them the right to

choose their own officers or constitution. At that Convention, the AFL representative Francis Dillon, presented a report of strikes that had occurred in the industry since the first of the year. 24,967 auto workers had been involved in strikes, with 101,167 days lost in the industry. He was forced to admit:

These activities represent the development of organization upon the part of the automobile worker and signifies the inevitable establishment of a practical and beneficial employer-employee relationship within the automobile industry.

(UAW Proceedings, 1935, p.48)

At the AFL Convention in Atlantic City, in October, 1935, all the resolutions supporting industrial unionism were defeated. But a minority emerged determined to continue the battle. On November 9, officials from 8 AFL unions met at UAW headquarters in Washington, D.C. and set up the Committee for Industrial Organization to intensify work within the AFL for industrial unionism.

CIO advocates were accused of dual unionism and by Aug., 1936, their unions were suspended from the AFL. The battle lines were drawn.

The victory of the Flint Sit Down strikers on February 11, 1937 marked the "first great crack in the anti-union barricade which rimmed the mass-production industries," comments James O. Morris in his book Conflict Within the AFL, (Ithaca, 1958, p.244).

A machine operator in a large Detroit factory, recalling the contemporaneous impact of the victory in Flint on other work-

ers around the country, said: "Little by little, we were getting information. And we figured if they can do it, we can also do it...So we decided on a certain day, a certain hour. And we sat down... We got rid of the manager and took the factory over." (Estelle Gornie Cassily, quoted in Working Detroit, Steve Babson, New York, 1984.)

That was the Spirit of '37. That was the tradition of the pioneer union builders in Flint, supported by auto workers from Toledo, Detroit, Saginaw, etc.

A sustained and difficult struggle had been waged both within the AFL against craft exclusiveness and paternalism, and outside against company unionism. As a G.M. official acknowledged, TOUGH COOKIES were forged through this process. The succeeding years of the fight against the No Strike Pledge, the fight for pensions, the fight against red baiting of the McCarthy era, the fight for the cost of living and for an open labor press -- these all required strenuous efforts on the part of the rank and file to wage the necessary battles both within and without their union. But the result is that industrial unionism has been permanently established in the mass production industries.

The articles in this volume, were originally published as newspaper articles, for the most part in the special anniversary edition of The Searchlight put out each year to commemorate the victory of February 11, 1937. There are many unsung heroes of Flint's industrial wars. They all deserve to be honored. Their story is the story of how the UAW was forged by the ranks.

## CONTENTS

TOUGH COOKIES (poem) /	i
Prologue /	ii
Introduction /	iv
Carl Johnson: A Pioneer Labor Journalist /	1
Jack Palmer, Shop News, and Rank and File Writing /	9
Mr Union Man: George Carroll, a Pioneer Labor Editor /	15
Letter to The Progressive /	25
The Searchlight, The War Years, and that Cynical Publicity Man Bert Boone /	28
Editor Greene and the Fight Against Censorship /	42
Shop Paper Poetry: A Hidden Working Class Tradition /	60
About the Poet /	73
The Tradition of Labor Cartooning and 'Doc' Wilson /	75
Epilogue /	85
We've Come a Long Way, Baby (poem) /	87

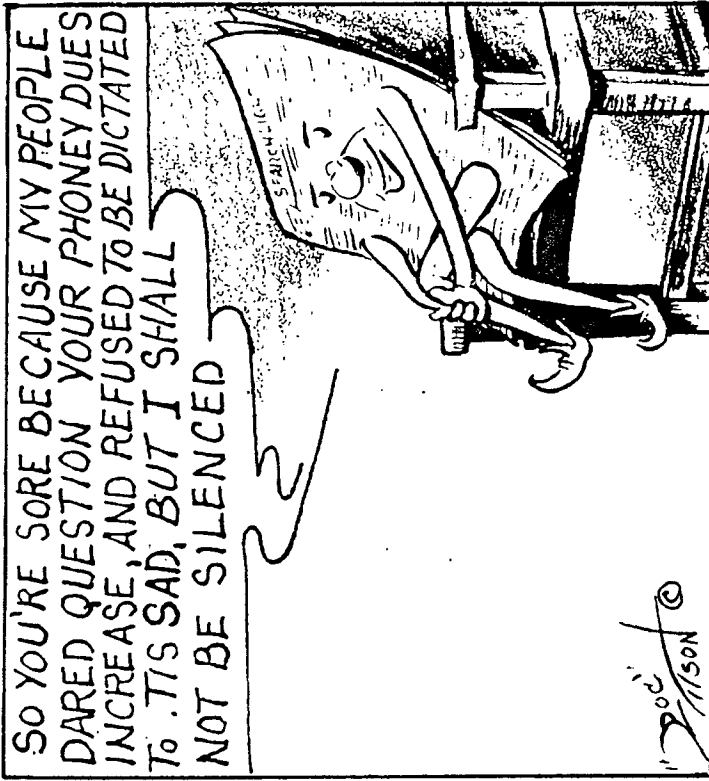
CARL JOHNSON: A PIONEER LABOR JOURNALIST

Flint has been the home of many outstanding labor pioneers. One such unionist was Carl Johnson. A eulogy written when he died in 1958 in *The Searchlight* (the local union newspaper of UAW Local 659-Flint) called him "one of the early founders of our industrial union movement." (*The Searchlight*, June 5, 1958, p. 3)

He had worked in the AFL Auto Workers Federal Union, and in 1933-1936 he helped to organize the local "League for Industrial Democracy" in Flint. His obituary tells how 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."

Carl Johnson went on to take part in "secret moves" to organize industrial unions sponsored by the U.M.W. It is not surprising then that one of Carl Johnson's sons, Kermit Johnson, played a vital role as a rank and file strategist in the successful "capture" of Plant 4 in The Great Flint Sit Down Strike. But Carl's contribution did not stop with the victory of the Sit Down Strike in 1937.

In the early 1940's, he helped contribute to the birth and development of the fledgling local union newspaper, *The Searchlight*. In those early days of the 1940's, the masthead of *The Searchlight* called itself "The Voice of the Chevrolet Worker." And Carl Johnson's column "Only More Democracy Can Save Democracy", which appeared regularly from the earliest days of the newspaper until his death, helped to define the importance Flint's pioneer unionists



attached to a labor press genuinely echoing the voice of the ranks.

It stood to reason in those early days of the UAW that someone had to figure out the direction forward for the young labor movement. And in his column, Carl Johnson argued that it was only the rank and file of the labor movement who could adequately foster its development and growth.

Just as the fledgling UAW organization opened its arms to all unionists regardless of their views on politics, economics and religion, so the fledgling labor newspaper opened its pages to all Chevrolet workers to debate and argue over the appropriate path forward for labor. In one of his columns, Carl Johnson explained why he felt it necessary for the labor press to open itself to a forum of diverse views:

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 decide.

(The Searchlight, Oct. 29, 1949)

One of the ways these early unionists saw of encouraging this forum was to invite all union members to write uncensored arti-

cles, and then to put in the rebuttals as well. In November of 1944, a district meeting of editors from ten local union newspapers in Lansing, Saginaw and Flint was held at Johnson's local. At this meeting, the editors endorsed the concept of "the uncensored column" for their newspapers. "Such an item," a 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, November 23, 1944, p. 1) Columns like "News from Poverty Flats", "A Laborer Looks at Life", "Winning for the Union", and "State of the Union" to name only a few appeared in the pages of this young newspaper, as well as articles, poems, letters and cartoons from a great variety of rank and file contributors.

In his column on February 1, 1945, Johnson elaborated on how this forum would serve labor: "If local union publications," he wrote, "provide the ranks with the 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."

While the discussion Johnson called for related to wages, hours, etc., he was also concerned with the need for 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, depressions 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 to change it?

(The Searchlight,  
March 1, 1945, p. 3)

And one has only to look back through the pages of The Searchlight during these early years to see some of the wide ranging debates that were carried on. For example, in 1949, the question of pensions was being hotly debated. Criticisms of the "inadequacy" of the newly negotiated Ford Pension Plan filled the newspaper's pages. Against this backdrop, a polemic on the virtues and criticisms of the "Free Enterprise" system appeared debating whether the U.S. was becoming a "Welfare State" or had already become a "military state". (Articles in The Searchlight like "The Welfare State", December 15, 1949, p. 2, "A Beautiful Theory But It Won't Work", December 29, 1949, and "Who Produces Profits", March 23, 1950, p. 2, give a flavor of this debate.)

While Carl Johnson's primary concern was for the debate over the long range needs of labor, he also saw the need for the local union press to monitor the activities of union leadership. He warned that "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." (The Searchlight, Jan. 11, 1951, p. 2)

Pioneer unionists like Carl Johnson adamantly believed in the need for a local trade union press. In what is perhaps his most eloquent defense of rank and file participation in the labor press of his times, he explains how only a local shop newspaper, as distinguished from the publications of the International Union, can be depended upon to promote the necessary progressive change. He explained:

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 promises 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 fu-



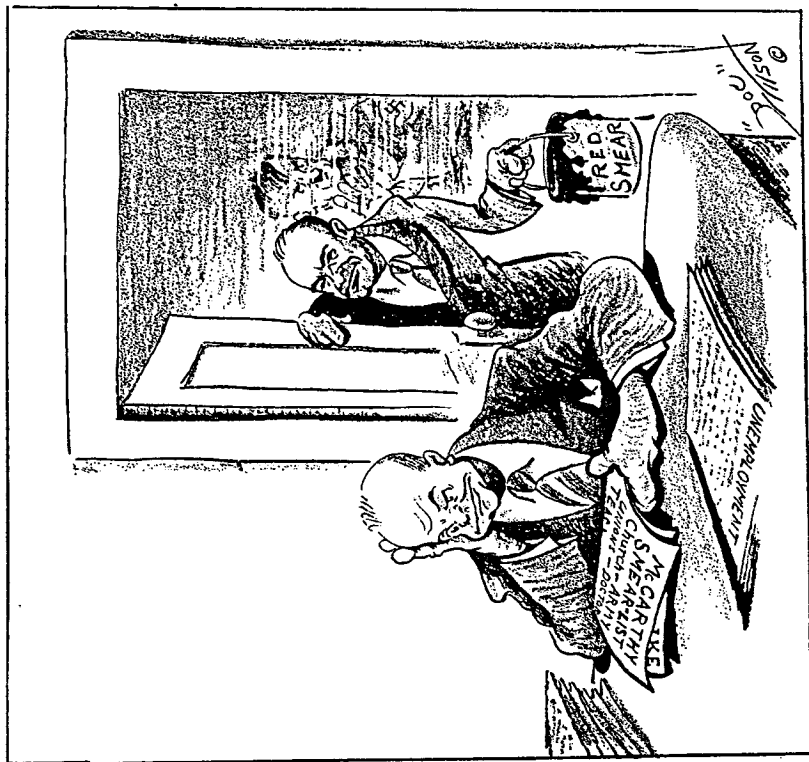
ture welfare of the rank and file depends largely upon the part the ranks play in shaping that future.... (The Searchlight, Jan. 11, 1951, p.2)

Understanding how dearly he cherished an independent labor press and freedom of speech, it is not surprising that when McCarthysm reared its head, Carl Johnson "did not flinch or budge because he believed so firmly in the ultimate victory of Truth." (The Searchlight, June 5, 1958, p. 3)

Flint has produced more than its share of pioneer unionists, who like Carl Johnson never sought gain nor reward for themselves. They sought only to make whatever contribution they could to the forward advance of their class - the working class. These men and women never hesitated to fight against the injustices they saw around them. In this time of the 50th Anniversary of the Great Flint Sit Down Strike it would seem to be an appropriate occasion to review some of the rarely mentioned contributions of these brave men and women who struggled so hard for the development of the labor movement and for progressive change in this country.

NOTES

1. Issues of old labor newspapers are not widely available. Fortunately, a few old issues of **The Searchlight** can be found in The Labadie Room at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, a substantial number are available to the public at the Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University, Detroit, and microfilm of issues dating back as far as September 14,



1944, are available at the main branch of The Flint Public Library. Unfortunately, this researcher has not been able to locate the earliest, pre-1943 issues of The Searchlight.

(The above article was originally printed in The Searchlight, Feb.4, 1983.)

**PLANT LIFE . . . . . By "Doc" Wilson**



**HOT WATER?—You must be new around here, Buster!!**

**JACK PALMER, SHOP NEWS,  
and RANK AND FILE WRITING**

I first met Jack Palmer at a history conference in Detroit in the Spring of 1981. He spoke at a workshop session about the Flint Sit Down Strike. After the talk, I asked Jack if the rank and file had done any writing to discuss the Sit Down Strike from their point of view. This question of rank and file writing became the basis of my contact with Jack Palmer over a year later.

In August, 1982, I went to the Pioneers' Picnic<sup>2</sup>. I had been hoping to find someone who had saved the earliest issues of The Searchlight which would be of help to the research I was doing. I knew the newspaper had been started before September, 1944, but had not been able to locate any of the earlier issues.

At the picnic, I asked some of the pioneers and they referred me to Jack Palmer. I had recognized him, but it was clear his health was a problem as he was sitting in a wheel chair equipped with an oxygen supply. It was also clear, however, from the many people who made it a point to stop and speak with Jack, that many were glad he had made the extra effort necessary to come to the picnic.

I went up and reintroduced myself and asked Jack if he, by chance, had any of the older issues of the newspaper or had any idea who else might. He told me that he had given his papers to the Reuther Archives several years before and thought some of the earlier issues of The Searchlight were among them. He told me to check again at the Archives, as he was sure some should be

there.

I had already asked several times, but at Jack's insistence, I again asked at the Archives and this time a suitcase was found that Jack had donated. It was filed with issues of *The Searchlight* from January, 1944 on, and contained three issues from 1943. After reading through these early issues, I gave Jack Palmer a call to thank him for his help.

He asked me if I had noticed the militance and fearlessness of the *Shop News* section in these early 1943 and 1944 issues. He pointed out how workers in the pages of the newspaper would compare certain supervisors to Nazis like Hitler or Goebels. Jack also explained how the first editor, George Carroll, had set a solid foundation for the newspaper which served for many years after. I asked Jack Palmer if I could come and talk with him further about his memories of those early years of the newspaper and he agreed.

When I got to Jack's house on Saturday, November 13, 1982, it seemed that he was still struggling against emphysema and had to use oxygen constantly. But that didn't stop him from carrying on the pioneering tradition of passing on the details and lessons of the struggle he had been part of. Jack recalled how George Carroll had encouraged him and other young people to write, had encouraged them to say what they felt was right to say and not to be timid. George Carroll, Jack explained, had set an example by the way he would take a firm stand in the articles he wrote for *The Searchlight*. The newspaper was very democratic. Everyone was invited to write, but George reserved the right to answer. Jack recalled how someone

defending the KKK wrote an article for the paper, but then Carroll "really did blast them." Jack explained how it really meant something to the people down in the plant to have an "open" newspaper -- they knew what real democracy was.

Jack described the awful conditions in the shop in the early 1940's. Workers would be sent home for looking out a window. They needed permission to get a drink of water. They weren't allowed to eat even a candy bar on the shop floor. On pay day, workers had to line up according to clock number and if anyone was found to be out of numerical sequence, the person would be sent to the end of the line. These were the kinds of oppressive conditions that *The Searchlight* in those early days helped to combat.

Jack explained how the *Shop News* section was the essence of the newspaper in the years of WWII. He outlined the shop steward system where every 250 workers would be organized into a district, with a shop steward, chairman, and secretary who would hold monthly meetings. The steward would keep track of what was happening in his or her department. For example, foremen were not supposed to work and would be reported if they did.

Such grievances would be aired in *The Searchlight*. On the day the newspaper came out, bundles were thrown out in front of the plant gates, and workers as well as supervisors would line up to get copies. Even management was anxious to see who was panned in the week's issue. As a result, there never seemed enough newspapers to go around.

## PLANT LIFE...by Doc Wilson

JUST WHY DO YOU INSIST ON  
THE COMMITTEE MAN EVERY  
TIME WE HAVE A LITTLE  
SHOWER ?



"They gave us hell," Jack recalled, describing management's treatment of the workers. That made it necessary for workers to fight to win the union. In reviewing those years of the early 1940's, Jack noted, "We didn't realize how much strength we had." The Sit Down, Jack felt, naturally made Local 659 workers better fighters. And he cited **The Committee to Exterminate the Parasitic Boss Class** formed by some Local 659 workers, as an example of the militance displayed in those years.

Jack Palmer went on to describe the campaign waged some time later by Local 659 and other Flint Locals for the Cost-of-Living Escalator, in opposition to Reuther's objections. In the next local election, Jack explained, he and other Presidents of the Flint Locals who had fought for the cost-of-living were defeated by opponents supported by the International. And when the Cost-of-Living Escalator was put into the U.A.W. contract, C.E. Wilson, the head of G.M. was given the credit.

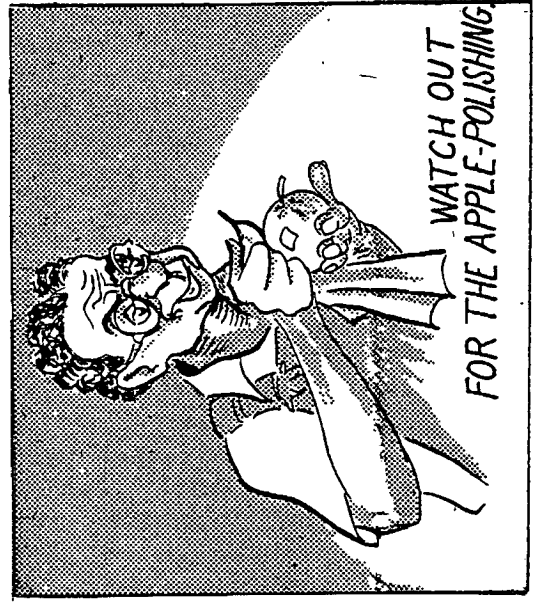
As the interview was drawing to a close, I asked Jack what lessons he drew from thinking over those early days. He again drew my attention to the militant and honest quality of the writing in the early issues of **The Searchlight** that we had been discussing. "Formerly," Jack noted, "workers had been thought of as a bunch of dummies. The people we uncovered," concluded Jack, "showed that if intelligence was used to better humanity, what a world this would be."

NOTES

1. Jack Palmer died on May 21, 1983. This article was written as a contribution to the tribute paid to him in the pages of The Searchlight when he died.

2. The Pioneers' picnic, held the first Saturday of August, is an institution begun several years ago in Flint to enable the pioneers of the Flint Sit Down Strike to get together once a year and to stay in touch with each other. It is also a time when the pioneers are happy to tell their stories of what they went through to win the Sit Down Strike and to give birth to the UAW to those of the younger generation who come to the picnic.

(The above article was originally printed in The Searchlight, June 24, 1983.)



MR UNION MAN  
George Carroll, A Pioneer Labor Editor

Let the pollys rant and rave  
Let the fakers fume and fret,  
George is not within the grave  
He's here in spirit yet.

In the conference room and hall,  
In the plant and on the floor,  
You can hear his voice call:  
"Show the dirty rats the door!"

The above poem was written as a tribute to George Carroll, an auto worker from Flint, Michigan. Carroll was one of the rank and file pioneers responsible for building the UAW. A eulogy recalls some of his accomplishments: "He was active in the sit-down strike of '37 when it wasn't healthy to even pretend to be a union man, let alone be one. He was one of the first Committeemen to operate in Chevrolet; served on numerous committees...."

But among UAW pioneers, Carroll is most dearly remembered as the editor of the local's union newspaper The Searchlight. (In fact, a eulogy published in The Searchlight when he died in 1954 comments that "He was the first and only Editor of The Searchlight. If in doubt about this just get one of the old copies of The Searchlight and compare it with any of the present ones.")

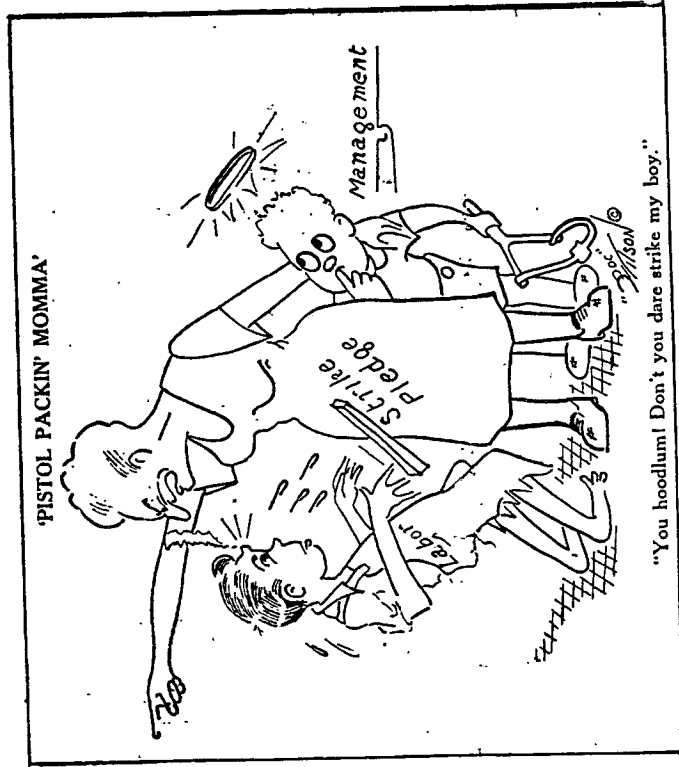
The repressive company-town atmosphere of Flint, Michigan (home of General Motors) had been broken by the victory of the 1936-37 Great Flint Sit Down Strike. Auto workers had won breathing space to exercise certain democratic rights -- the right to organize a union, to freedom of speech and assembly,

and to freedom of the press. But the struggle to build their union had just begun.

The U.S. entered W.W. II in December, 1941. R. J. Thomas and his Executive Board, the top leadership of the UAW, agreed to a "no strike pledge" with management. In the context of their struggle against management and their top union leadership, the rank and file of the Chevy Local (UAW-Local 659, Flint, MI) put out the first issue of *The Searchlight* in May, 1942. The subtitle of the paper was "The Independent Voice of an Autonomous Local." George Carroll was elected by the membership as the first editor.

An article honoring Carroll describes the great responsibility the pioneer editor assumed by taking on to define and put out a genuinely militant workers' newspaper. "The funds at the disposal of the infant union were quite limited in those days. As important as an independent local union paper was deemed to be, other activities were often given priority. With the meager financial assistance provided, the paper in reality became an extension of George himself. It was literally a one man operation whose vitality and very sustenance depended on the dedication and perseverance of a class conscious editor -- George Carroll."

Just what was the role of an editor of a truly rank and file newspaper? During the three one-year-terms George Carroll served, the newspaper provided a model of grass roots militance. It was honest, hard-hitting and willing to criticize all those who violated the principles of unionism. Contributions from friends of labor were sought and printed, but rank and file workers were particularly encouraged to speak their minds



and lash out with their grievances.

Complaints against the unfair or brazen actions of particular foremen appeared in column length articles like: "Why Management Doesn't Like the Searchlight." But the most common form of the printed grievance was in the several pages titled "Shop News." Here committeemen and -women and union workers were encouraged to speak out against despotic supervisors or stool pigeon tendencies in other workers. Here the grass roots of the union had space to comment on and evaluate in prose or verse their day-to-day lives on the shop floor. The following few verses from one of the many poems that appeared in this section of the paper give a flavor of the shop floor critics and commentators who flourished under George Carroll's editorship:

...

I see funny things as I work at my job

And watch the workers around me,

I compare the actions of Tom, Dick and Bob

With those of the girls -- who  
astound me.

...

And, o! isn't our foreman the cutest man

Let's buy him a nice electric razor

But, if Tom, Dick or Bob had suggested  
the plan

They'd accuse him of seeking his favor.

But it's not just the girls who inspire  
me to write

For I see men do things just as gay  
Out trying to "Wolf" while their wife's  
home at night

Apputting his babies away.

Some think they're Casanova, himself  
The way they 'moon' at the women  
A good swift kick in the seat of the  
pants

Would set their heads a swimmin'.

While a substantial "Shop News" section was the heart of the newspaper, Editor Carroll welcomed, nugged and inspired a variety of other kinds of contributions. There were exposes of G.M.'s secret dealings with German Companies ("Cartels and Military 'Secrets'"), exposes of turncoat politicians ("How Sharper than a Serpent's Tooth is the Ingratitude of A Thankless Politician"), and articles criticizing local or International union leadership for pro company actions or tendencies ("Mirzy Doats, Doezy Doats and 'R. J. Doats'"). There were articles in support of forming a labor party ("A Labor Party Is the Answer"), and articles and poems outlining the war to be waged at home ("Let's Clean Up Main Street," and "The Old Sit Down Corner: The War Within"). Also, the institution of freedom of the press was analyzed. One writer argued that the very statement of freedom of the press in the Bill of Rights demonstrated worthwhile news would be judged offensive by someone. If the press doesn't print news that "someone would prefer not to hear," the writer reasoned, then why bother to protect it in the Bill of Rights.

A "Letter to the Editor" summarized the open policy of the paper during Carroll's editorship: "Anyone submitting an article for publication, need only be a member in good standing. Whether the editor agreed with it or not made no difference. But one thing for sure, it would be published." Articles were accepted regardless of the

form they were submitted in and then typed by the stenographer of the local. "The boys (and girls-ed), scribble their contributions on just about everything but money," a writer noted.

Just as Carroll encouraged rank and file contributions, he was equally ruthless in protecting the paper from political careerists. Articles espousing questionable or anti-union sentiments were printed, but accompanied by an Editor's reply or some other form of refutation. And union officials were prohibited from using the paper to promote themselves by a policy which stated **The Searchlight** would not "permit any officer, Local, Regional or International, to have a column for the purpose of building themselves politically." Carroll was vigilant that the paper not become "the mouth-piece of the incumbency."

As editor, Carroll insisted on the right of his newspaper to publish criticism of any union officer who failed to fulfill his obligations to the membership. In response to one of the many attacks he and other members of the editorial board were subjected to from certain union leaders and their promoters among the rank and file, Carroll responded:

We have criticized (not attacked) R. J. Thomas and Phillip Murray 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.

When his opponents charged him with allowing **The Searchlight** to be filled with

personal attacks upon "Local and International Leaders," and letting the company know the "inner union squabbles," Carroll responded, pointing out the obligation of a workers' newspaper to "print the news as we find it to be, truthful, and without regard to partisanship or factionalism. Even without a paper," he reminded his opponent, "there is no question but that Chevrolet management would keep themselves fully posted as to the doings of our Local."

The ranks wanted "honest exposures", argued one of the many articles supporting Carroll's stand. Otherwise, they wouldn't be so eager to read each new edition of **The Searchlight** and pass favorable remarks on the articles found therein... **The Searchlight** is the only thing left in Local 659 that has any resemblance of real militant spirit .... If we are reluctant to criticize," the writer warned, "the rank and file may become so dormant that the union will fall into the hands of unscrupulous people, who will not operate the organization in the best interest of its members." ("Honest Criticism Via the Liberal Searchlight")

In March, 1945, Carroll resigned the Editorship because he judged that internal union politics would no longer allow him to carry out his obligations to the membership. Summarizing the achievements of his terms in office, 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."

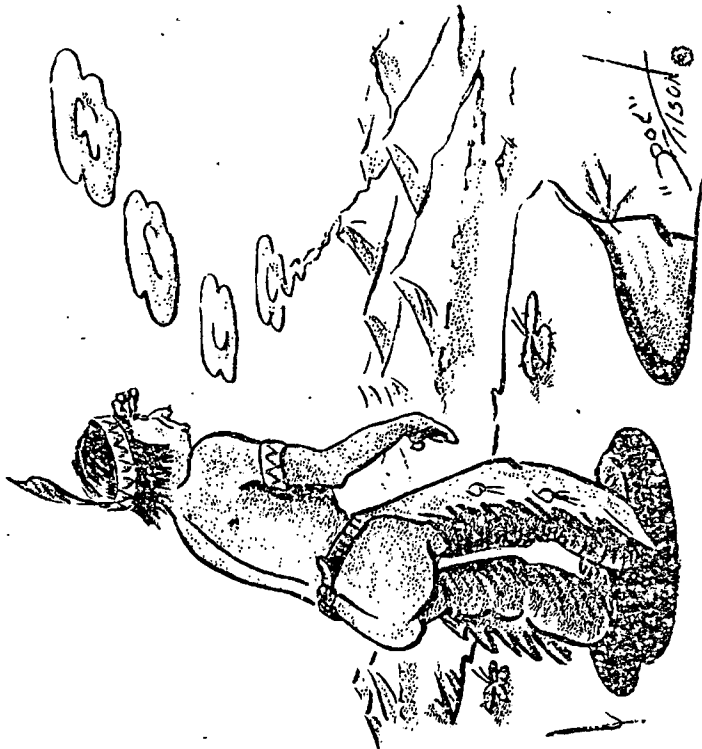
George Carroll remained a production worker at G.M.'s Chevrolet Plant in Flint until his death in 1954. During the early 1950's he wrote a column "News from Poverty Flats" which appeared in The Searchlight off and on during the newspaper's bouts of censorship from the International. Also, Carroll was one of the officers of a club of Chevy auto workers who signed "Committee to Exterminate the Boss Class" to articles they wrote for The Searchlight during the period of the McCarthy witch hunts. George Carroll was but one of a group of trade unionists who stood up against the infamous redbaiting of the 1950's.

The "Old Rebel" as Carroll was known<sup>1</sup> died Oct. 1, 1954. A eulogy paid this tribute to him:

To the union men who knew him, this is the worse loss our local has suffered since the inception of organized labor in Flint. 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 Demsey 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 .... He was liked and respected by all union men; hated and feared by all fakers and scissor-bills. His principles were, never give a rat a break.

## PLANT LIFE

..... By 'Doc' Wilson



Holy Smokes, Chief! What's the House Un-American Activities Gonna Say?

LETTER TO THE PROGRESSIVE

(An edited version of this letter was published in the October, 1984 issue of The Progressive.)

Dear Editor,

In the article "Labor Pains: The Unions Regroup" in the July, 1984 issue of The Progressive, Jane Slaughter traces the concessions negotiating of our times back to the period following WWII. She writes: "Labor relied on the expanding American economy rather than on the mobilization of its membership .... Workers could count on reaping greater material rewards year after year, even if they were losing control over the workplace day after day .... There seemed no reason to risk biting the corporate hand that fed labor."

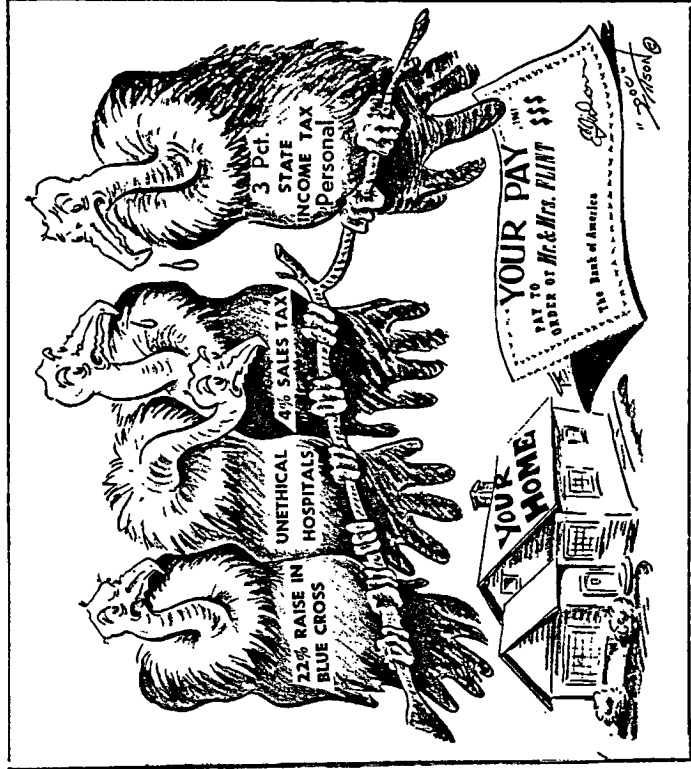
I have spent several years researching shop papers of UAW Locals during that post war period, and I find the portrayal of a "corporated hand that fed labor" different from the history documented in these labor papers.

For example, take the little known story of how the cost of living was won by the auto workers. The end of WWII brought spiraling prices and relatively low wages, and a debate in the labor movement over how to deal with the problem. Some believed it was useless to fight for higher wages as that would just lead to increased prices, in a never ending spiral. But rank and file columnists in some UAW shop newspapers showed how the price of the automobile was determined by the labor that went into it. Prices could not be set arbitrarily by cor-

NOTES

1. Quotes used in this article were all taken from The Searchlight. Most of the articles referred to appeared during Carroll's terms as editor; eulogies printed in the October 12, 1954 issue and the February 6, 1981 issue were also quoted from. Some of these issues should now be available in the Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University, Detroit.

(The above article was originally printed in The Searchlight, Feb. 4, 1984.)

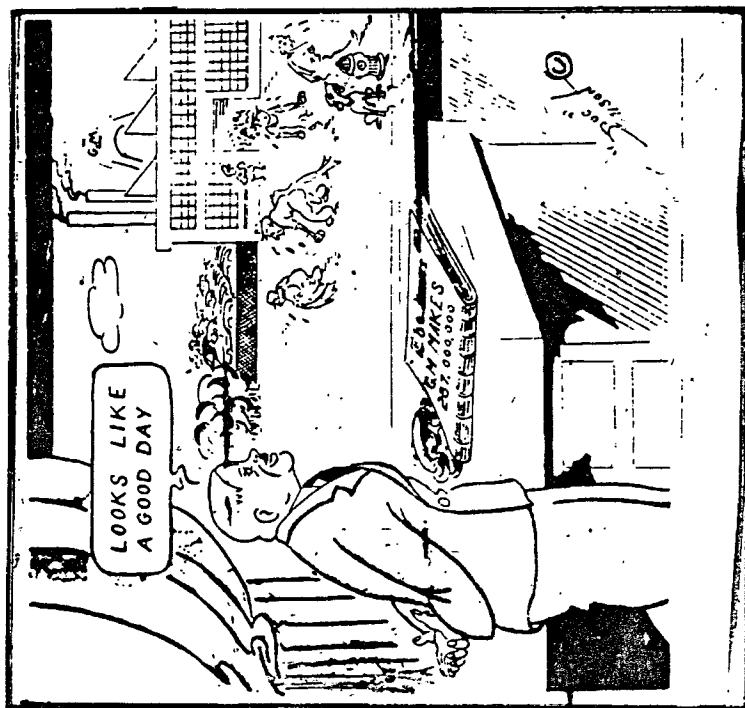


porations. Increased wages were not the cause of higher prices, but they would lower profits. The solution put forward from the ranks of the UAW was a cost of living escalator clause as the means to deal with the problem of inflation.

Upper echelons of the UAW, including the International Executive Board and Walter Reuther presented a different view. They opposed an escalator clause. Instead, Reuther called corporations to "Open the Books". He claimed this would show big profits which could sustain wage increases and nice profits. Otherwise he would lower wage demands. With these two proposals on the table, a struggle went on within the UAW press. The Presidents of 5 UAW Locals in Flint, MI wrote articles in their shop newspapers, issued a press release carried by a major Detroit newspaper, went on radio, etc. Waging a campaign for a cost of living escalator clause in the upcoming contract. Walter Reuther and the International Executive Board of the UAW opposed the idea and criticized the five Flint UAW Locals for advocating it. Thus, when the cost of living clause was won in the 1948 contract, it was the result of an extensive grassroots campaign, and not, a gift from the company. A similar history of grassroots struggle at the level of the Union Locals is documented in UAW shop papers for other gains of the period like pensions, 30 and out, etc.

Local union newspapers of the period are often hard to find, but those like The Searchlight, the newspaper of UAW Local 659, are a gold mine of historical documentation of the hard won gains of the period.

Ronda Hauben, Detroit, MI



THE SEARCHLIGHT, THE WAR YEARS,  
AND THAT CYNICAL PUBLICITY MAN:  
BERT BOONE

Currently there is a view being put forward among labor historians that sees the 1936-37 Sit Down Strike in Flint as the high water mark of the American labor movement. This viewpoint maintains that after this notable strike, American labor has only gone downhill.

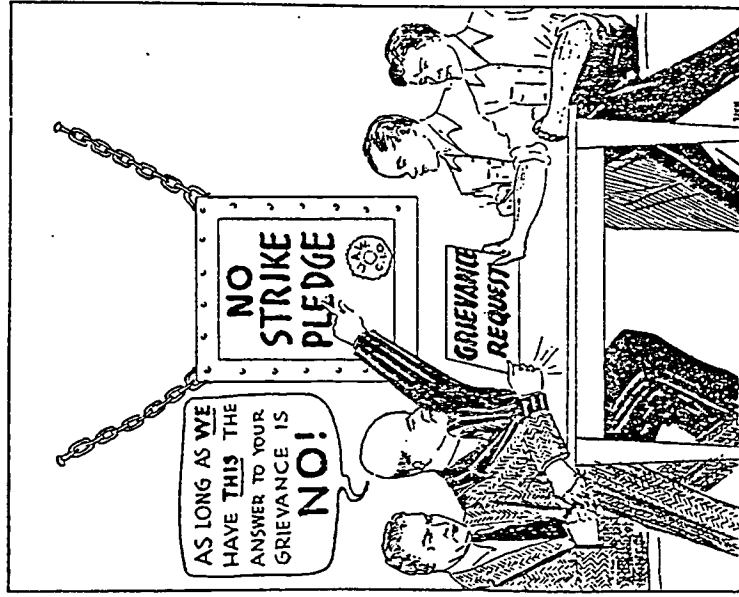
Such an evaluation fails to acknowledge the achievements won and safeguarded by industrial unionists after 1937 -- like seniority, paid vacations, paid health insurance, pensions, early retirement based on service, etc. Also this view denies the great achievement of the Flint Sit Down Strike itself. As a result of their victory, Flint auto workers won the right to continue their struggle in a more sustained and vigorous form. Founded in May, 1942 in the midst of WWII, The Searchlight, the newspaper put out by UAW-Local 659 became a public voice documenting the battle to defend and build on the gains of the victory of 1937.

Bert Boone<sup>1</sup> was one of the co-editors on the Publicity Committee in 1943. His articles appeared in The Searchlight throughout the war period. These articles demonstrate the critical and independent spirit strong among the rank and file during these formative years of the UAW. And articles by pioneer unionists like Bert Boone provide a concrete record of the day to day battles waged for the gains bequeathed to the current generation.

Chief among the concerns of the period

# STOP

## Collective Begging



## VOTE TO REPEAL THE NO STRIKE PLEDGE.



was the effort to overturn the No Strike Pledge (which had been given in the name of Labor for the duration of WWII)<sup>2</sup>. Articles by Bert Boone in **The Searchlight** provide a description of how the pledge was made without the consent or consultation of the membership. He writes:

Many people are of the mistaken idea that the C.I.O. and A.F.L. unions gave the infamous No Strike Pledge. Nothing is further from the truth. The two high monguls of C.I.O. and A.F.L. (Phil Murray and Bill Green) met President Roosevelt in the White House on December 17, 1941, and gave the pledge for practically all of organized labor.

(Sept. 14, 1944, **The Searchlight**, "Referendum: Intl. Officers and Regional Directors Must be Elected by Referendum Vote.....")

In his article, Boone assesses the effect on the union movement of the pledge. He writes:

We hear so much about democracy in labor unions, especially the UAW-CIO that the majority of the membership actually believe it. But when one man at the top can by his word (and without consultation of his following) give away the life of the organization leaving only the corpse it is the time for a rebellion against such dictatorship....

Boone's article gives an account of the meeting of the U.A.W.-C.I.O. in April, 1942, when the No Strike Pledge was brought to the UAW membership. He explains:

The U.A.W.-C.I.O. held its farcical

conference in the city of Detroit April 7 and 8, 1942, where ... hand picked delegates more firmly entangled our union with dictatorship and left the dues paying members practically impotent as far as economic strength is concerned.

He describes Local 659's participation in the April Meeting:

Local 659 sent seventeen delegates to the above mentioned conference and not one of them was voted upon by the membership....

The rank and file sentiment against the No Strike Pledge was so strong in Local 659 that the National Labor Relations Board was forced to hold a vote on the question at the Local. The question put to the membership read: "Do you wish to permit an interruption of war production in war time as a result of this dispute?"

An article by Bert Boone appeared in **The Searchlight** protesting the wording of the referendum question. Boone wrote:

You wouldn't expect such an intimidating question from such a free, democratic U.S. Gov't institution, would you. That is the way Hitler conducts votes. They always said that when Hitler permitted the Germans to vote he made arrangements for the result to be practically 98% 'ja'! meaning 'Yes'. Only in our vote they meant us to vote 'Nix'.

(March 2, 1944, **The Searchlight**, "8,099 Vote Yes...")

Of the 11,118 members in the Local at the time of the vote, 8,099 voted "Yes" casting their ballots against the No Strike Pledge. 2,070 voted "No". The large vote in favor of strike action demonstrated the strong rank and file condemnation of the bad conditions in the plant. Yet, Boone wasn't very optimistic about the effect the vote would have. He explained: "It is up to the 8,099 yes votes to see to it that our demands are met. There will be lots of effort exerted trying to stall us off, I mean by our own leaders as well as government officials."

He goes on to point out that despite the strong opposition within the ranks to the pledge, the CIO leadership was still actively backing the pledge. "I see by the papers," his article notes, "that the National C.I.O. convention in session in Philadelphia voted unanimously (600 strong) to reaffirm the "No-Strike Pledge" regardless of what takes place...It is my opinion," he explains, "that such seller-outers should be excommunicated or whatever one does to coat tail riders such as them."

Boone wrote several articles during the period explaining why there was such opposition within the ranks of the union to the Pledge:

They [the employers-ed] have taken advantage of the fact that we've discarded our weapon and they proceed to give us the works.

(Sept. 16, 1943, The Searchlight, "Management Institutes Terrorism")

His article provides several concrete illustrations of how management was encouraged by

the pledge to mistreat the workers in the shop. "The company," he writes, "fomented labor unrest in Plant 3 last week to the point of a strike. They fired a committeeman and the war was on." Another provocation he describes:

The personnel director told the shop committeemen that all those who went back to work would do so without penalty. Later a woman was fired. The company claimed that she proved to be a positive leader in the disturbance.

His article details other examples:

The company is firing committeemen for what it says is disobeying foremen's orders. For instance, a committeeman leaned against a conveyor while talking to an aggrieved party and he was sent home....War workers are sent home a whole shift or more for such petty excuses as being a minute late....Management has made virtual stool pigeons of all their supervisors and watchmen....

In response to these incidents, his article issues a warning to management:

Just go ahead, our day is coming and we will be sure to remember you .... until they change their tactics and attitude toward labor, we propose to give them the works.

In another article, one which he wrote to support the miners and John L. Lewis, their leader, Boone put forward a program for dealing with the problems in the shops. He wrote: "...So let's repeal the no-strike

clause. Also change union leadership if need be, as well as oust the Tories in Congress and let's fight to win on the home front as well as any other front if we must." (June 24, 1943, The Searchlight, "Lewis is a Real Leader")

On the basis of his fearless exposures and positions, the membership elected Bert Boone President of Local 659 in March of 1944. In his acceptance note, published in The Searchlight, he wrote:

It is with a deep sense of obligation that I express my sincere thanks to you, the whole membership of Local 659, for your confidence so liberally shown in the final local election.... It is my firm intention to always remember that the people who elected me to office can remove me from office....

After taking office as President, Boone resigned his position on the Publicity Committee. But he continued to submit exposures and articles to The Searchlight on a regular basis and to defend the newspaper's independence. In an article called "Fascism In Action", Boone writes:

The regional office as well as the Intl. Office, is just biding its time to pounce upon The Searchlight and destroy it, simply because it stands practically alone in the whole union as being unafraid to tell the truth to the rank and file about the condition of the union and is unafraid to honestly and sincerely criticize the policies, principles and tactics of union and public

officials impartially."

(March 16, 1944, The Searchlight) Also during Boone's tenure of office, a memo to strengthen the Standing Committees in the Local was published in The Searchlight. Committees were encouraged to offer recommendations to be acted upon by the Executive Board and membership:

To: All Standing Committees  
From: Bert Boone  
Subject: Recommendations

A recommendation was made in the December 3, 1944 Executive Board Meeting of Local 659 to the effect that I should direct a request letter to all standing committees of the Local Union having recommendations to be acted upon by the Executive Board and the membership to consider and act upon....

(Dec. 21, 1944, The Searchlight)

Bert Boone's efforts to expose any anti-democratic activities on the part of public or union officials continued unabated during his tenure as President of the Local. For example, commenting on the Democratic National Convention held in 1944, Boone discussed his evaluation of the C.I.O.-P.A.C. (Political Action Committee). He explains:

The democratic national convention is recent history.... I think the reason for the negligible success of the C.I.O. P.A.C. is attributed to the desires of the national officers and International Unions affiliated with the C.I.O. to retain and enforce the

"No Strike" pledge upon the workers at the complete expense of C.I.O.-unions....Another contributing factor is...that politicians inside and outside of the union drafted the whole C.I.O.-P.A.C. program and are desperately trying to jam it down the throats of the workers of the C.I.O.

(Aug. 3, 1944, The Searchlight, "Labor's Rank and File Should Build a Labor Party")

Boone felt U.S. labor needed a party independent of the Democrats and Republicans, like the British Labor Party. He wrote: "Actually, all workers should ban together in reputation of their national leaders (relative to political action) and form a strong labor party."

Not only did Bert Boone serve as President of Local 659 during this period. He was also active in statewide efforts to form a Labor Party modeled after the Canadian Commonwealth Federation. He served as Vice Chairman of the County MCF Committee (Michigan Commonwealth Federation). And he worked with the Rank and File Caucus in the Michigan C.I.O. promoting a program to defeat the No Strike Pledge and the union officers who supported it.

During his term as President, the Local continued its program of sending cigarettes and The Searchlight overseas to servicemen. And many of the hundreds of letters and postcards received from soldiers where published in The Searchlight.

The U.A.W. Convention of 1944 marked a turning point in Boone's presidency. An article he wrote for The Searchlight eval-





uated the gains of the rank and file. The International union officers had agreed to hold a referendum on the No Strike Pledge, a proposed increase in the expense accounts of International Representatives had been defeated, and there was not to be any new dues increase. Boone sums up these developments:

The rank and file made themselves heard at this convention to a greater extent than ever before. Let us hope we can continue to progress until the machine has been beaten and control of the union is placed in the hands of the rank and file where it rightfully belongs.

(Sept. 28, 1944, The Searchlight, "The Curtain Falls on 1944 Convention")

He described the role played by members of the Local at the Convention. "I wish to point out," he writes, "that Local 659 elected fourteen delegates to the convention who ran on a program of 'Smash the No Strike' [Pledge]. We were very instrumental in obtaining the right to a referendum vote on the issue....It is very definitely a step in the right direction. We need to have more and more important issues decided by the membership, not less and less...."

Boone's term as President ended with his loss of the 1945 election. The results of the election were appealed to the International and Bert Boone went back to work in the shop. Among the election irregularities reported in an article he wrote about the appeal was a discrepancy in the counting of ballots. Boone explains:

Rule No. 2 of the Election Committee

rules governing conduct of the election plainly states quote, "Each voter must be checked by office files and files must be stamped with date," end of quote.

That very obviously was flagrantly violated because there were exactly 868 less files stamped with date than there were total ballots cast according to the report of the election committee.

(June 21, 1945, The Searchlight, "Bert Boone Says")

Boone also criticized the International's handling of his appeal. In his article in The Searchlight, he writes:

The election was finished February 23, 1945, and the decision of the International Executive Board was dated April 26, 1945, two full months after the election. The Board conventionally took lots of time in order for the stench of such a lousy deal to sort of disappear from the nostrils of the membership. The lousy manner in which the investigation was conducted plus the flat refusal to examine vital evidence causes me to charge that the International Executive Board WHITEWASHED the election of Local Union Officers and Shop Committee of last February....

Though no longer an officer of the Local, Bert Boone went on to remain active in union affairs and to contribute articles to The Searchlight. Among the articles he contributed over the years were: "Who Produces Profits", March 23, 1950; "Leeches, Leeches and More Leeches", May 4, 1950; "Do

We Want a Union?", March 9, 1950; "Open Letter to Ken Malone", Nov. 15, 1951; "Early Retirement A Must", May 29, 1959; "Local 659 Pays Tribute to Kermit Johnson", Sept. 14, 1967.

In summing up Bert Boone's term as President, a Letter published in the Aug 2, 1945 issue of The Searchlight provided this appraisal:

Local 659 was six years old last March. Out of all these 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. That is the only logical way to coordinate the functions of all departments of any business. Such leadership was unknown before Boone's tenure of office and it isn't being done now....

(Aug. 2, 1945, The Searchlight, "It's My Opinion: Is this Depression....", Floyd Davenport.)

Floyd Davenport, the author of this letter, goes on to note that after their term of office was over, Bert Boone, and his vice president, Clyde King, returned to work in the shop. Davenport writes:

There have been only two full time officers that have served Local 659 (and they served it well) who have

returned to the shop after serving the Local Union. They are Bert Boone and Clyde King. All others have been picked up by the International without regard to ability... No doubt the fact that Bert and Clyde refused to stooge for the Brass Hats is the reason....

Bert Boone died in April, 1969. A eulogy published in The Searchlight summed up Bert Boone's contribution to the labor movement:

We have lost a true champion and defender of our rights and of the cause of labor."

(Apr. 17, 1969, The Searchlight, "Unionists Mourn Passing of Bert Boone", by Larry Jones)

#### NOTES

1. Floyd Hoke-Miller suggested that something be written about Bert Boone. "I believe," said Floyd Hoke-Miller, "that Bert Boone made one of the best contributions to Labor of anyone during that period (the years of W.W.II)."
2. The illustration on page 29 "Stop Collective Begging" was the front page of a booklet published by UAW-Local 659 during W.W.II and distributed along with an issue of The Searchlight during this period.

(The above article was originally printed in The Searchlight, Feb. 8, 1985.)

EDITOR GREENE AND THE FIGHT AGAINST  
CENSORSHIP

Our 'Searchlight' must be left  
untouched  
It's freedom we must keep  
And truly be the workmen's voice  
Or bitterness we'll reap.  
from poem by Harry E. Darr  
(The Searchlight, April 2,  
1951 p.2)

The above stanza from a poem called  
"Memo to Convention Delegates" describes the  
struggle waged by the pioneers of UAW-Local  
659 (Flint, MI) against efforts to impose  
censorship on their shop paper.

The Searchlight, the newspaper of UAW-  
Local 659, was begun in May, 1942. At the  
founding meeting, a policy was established  
that the paper should provide an open forum  
for the rank and file of the Local to debate  
the issues and questions of importance to  
them. Reviewing this first meeting, a writer  
tells what happened:

I recall very distinctly the first  
meeting of the Editorial Staff some  
year and a half ago when Brothers  
Thompson, Johnson, Carroll, Green and  
myself agreed on the policy, that any  
article of a controversial nature must  
be signed and it would be printed and  
I believe that policy still holds.  
(!!Correction!!" by Don Chapman,  
Jan.6, 1944, p. 2)

Throughout the early years of The  
Searchlight, this policy was stated fre-  
quently in the newspaper and members wrote  
expressing their approval or disapproval of

how thoroughly the policy of an "uncensored"  
press was being carried out. For example, in  
1948, members objected that the Editorial  
Board was not fulfilling its obligation to  
publish contributions. A resolution was  
passed at a membership meeting. The resolu-  
tion in part read:

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: THIS GREAT INTERNATIONAL  
UNION, THE UAW-CIO, HAS ALWAYS BE-  
LIEVED IN AND ADVOCATED FREE SPEECH  
AND A FREE PRESS; AND

WHEREAS: The membership of Local No.  
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 that  
UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES WERE THEY TO  
REJECT ARTICLES MERELY BECAUSE THE  
OPINIONS EXPRESSED DID NOT COINCIDE  
WITH THEIR OWN;.....

(reprinted Feb. 9, 1950,p.1)

The resolution went on to instruct the  
Editorial Staff to "PUBLISH WITHOUT DELAY  
ALL ARTICLES SUBMITTED" as long as they  
weren't libelous.

Throughout the 1940's, there was a  
struggle within Local 659 to uphold this  
policy of an "uncensored" press.

In an article published in March 24,  
1949, Carl Johnson, a rank and file colum-

nist dedicated his column to the question "HOW IMPORTANT IS OUR SEARCHLIGHT?"

He explains:

It [The Searchlight -ed] has, almost from the beginning, eight or nine years ago, been exceptionally bold in presenting various shades of opinions and philosophies....But just how important is that bold policy? The political, economic and social progress of labor is beset with obstacles much the same as those which beset the early pioneers in their conquest of the wilderness. Had those pioneers let themselves be intimidated as most of the rank and file press is, the wilderness would never have been conquered.

Comparing the fight for a rank and file press to the early fight for unions, Johnson writes:

An even more apt comparison was the building of unions. Without the bold challenge of the status-quo at the risk of losing one's job and of busted heads, there would never have been a union....

"But," Johnson cautions, "rank and file papers are of little value in a chaotic world if they fail to come out boldly with ideas for a better world. The reason is simple," he writes, "---it is the ranks that do the work, the starving, fighting, dying and paying. Therefore, the backbone of any desirable change will have to come from the ranks." Johnson continues:

Second only to pioneering ideas, is the necessary perorgative of shop papers to offer constructive criticism of representatives in office whether in the union or in civic office....It is rather noticeable that the top wants to make policy and then to have the rank and file press back it up while in a real democracy the reverse would be true. Yes our shop paper is of utmost importance. If we carefully guard its functions it will pioneer the way to a better day.

("Only More Democracy...", March 24, 1949)

By 1949, The Searchlight's policy of encouraging grass roots discussion resulted in a direct confrontation with the International Officers of the UAW. A company paid Pension Plan had become a bargaining priority. The principles set out in the pages of The Searchlight called for:

- 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 by the corporation.

(Dec. 1, 1949, p.3)

Articles in The Searchlight expressed dissatisfaction with a recently negotiated Ford Pension Plan. (See "Resolution on Ford Pension," Oct. 20, 1949). For example, one writer commented:

Hurry with the Pension Plan before us guys in Plant 6 freeze to death. We

guys in Plant 6 had rather have some heat as to have that darn old Ford Pension Plan.

s/One Lung

The Editor of The Searchlight in 1949 was Dale Greene. He had been one of the founders of the newspaper. In an editorial called, "Big Business Bows to We, the People," Editor Greene describes the opposition to the Ford Pension Plan within the Chevy Local:

At long last the monguls of industry have admitted the necessity of pensions for those who have pioneered the auto world with BARE HANDS....It is true that it is a step in the right direction. It is also true that the loop holes in the FORD contract are MANY and LARGE.... To place the stamp of approval on said 'Pension' plan would be a 'blunder of the highest magnitude.'

(Oct. 6, 1949, p.2)

The President of Local 659 during this period was Coburn Walker. In his column in The Searchlight, he reported that during the UAW General Motors Conference held in Detroit Nov. 10 and 11, 1949, Local Union Presidents who opposed the Ford Pension Plan were "referred to as 'Pinks, Punks and Parasites'" by International Officers because "of the fact that we had the intestinal fortitude to oppose a pension plan for G.M. workers such as that which was approved by the International Union for Ford Workers." ("The President's Column," Nov. 17, 1949)

Commenting on this effort to suppress opposition Dale Greene wrote:

Those who oppose the Ford Pension Plan were called 'Pinks, Punks, and Parasites.' Isn't that the NICEST thing to say about the membership of the UAW because we WANT, NEED, and are desirous of having a DECENT and ADEQUATE pension for our people!  
("G.M. Conference," Nov. 17, 1949, p.2)

Members of the Local resented being denied the right to criticize the Ford Pension Plan. For example, one writer explains:

I am thankful for the Searchlight, which gives each member a chance of free speech without interference from certain people who would like to take over and dictate the policies of our membership....From the looks of these lousey contracts and pension plans, some of the officers in Detroit should be getting in line....I think the membership of Local 659 will agree with me when I say the employees of Chevrolet Motor Company are a bull-headed bunch of people when it comes to being shoved around by the International Officers. They just don't shove easily! As the late Franklin Roosevelt used to say, I quote,"Let's look at the record." Unquote.  
(Floyd Davenport, "Officers and members of Local 659," Dec. 29, 1949, p.3)

Editor Greene felt at the root of the conflict between Local 659 and the International Officers was the question of "Local Autonomy" versus "Top Rule Leadership". He writes:

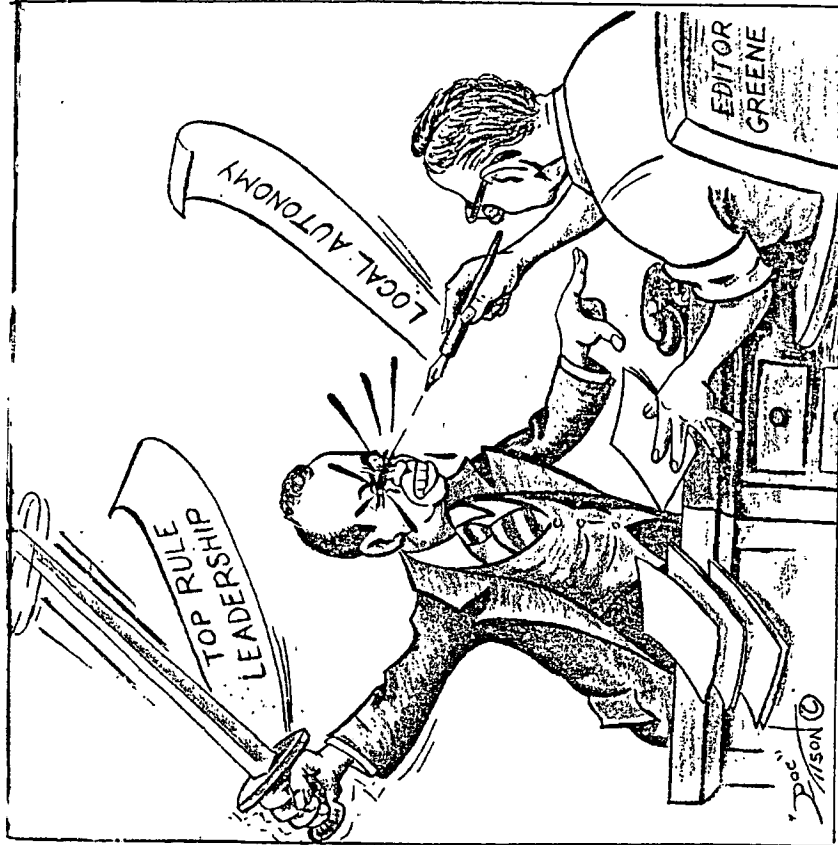
If you will bear with me through this Editorial and the subsequent editions of the 'Searchlight,' I hope to CLARIFY my thinking on the following subjects; namely, 'Local Autonomy' or 'Top Rule Leadership'.... It has always been my contention that the membership should know the score through their publicity committee, I intend it to be so. Perhaps I will lose my official Head for being open and above board, but I shall NOT go into mourning because of such action, since they shot Abraham Lincoln for daring to tell the truth..."  
 ("Psychologically Speaking," Dec. 29, 1949.)

Coburn Walker viewed the issue as the defense of the rights of the rank and file. He wrote:

The Rank and File must be the governing body in our Union or the tail will wag the dog. We do not intend that those whom we have supported and elected into high office be permitted to dictate to us to the contrary. We intend to dictate to them as to the wishes and desires of the rank and file as a whole.

("The President's Column," Dec. 14, 1950)

The debate between the International Officers and the writers in The Searchlight continued throughout 1950 over a variety of questions. Articles like "21 Or Bust" and "Why Is the Union Shop Necessary" (Jan. 26, 1950), "Chiselers and Porkchoppers Attempt to Raise Dues" (Sept. 7, 1950), "Secretary Mazezy Ans Bro Eleazer" (Oct. 19, 1950), "The



Five Year Plan: Russia or America" (June 29, 1950) give a flavor of the polemics in the pages of The Searchlight during the period.

Writing his Christmas Editorial in Dec. 1950, Editor Greene explained the importance of maintaining the shop paper as a weapon in Labor's continuing battles:

Our Local Union was built and maintained on the information and pertinent FACTS published in our paper since the (SIT DOWN) strike in 1936. It is "TRUE" that some people's feelings have been hurt. We, the Editors, of your paper, The Greenes, The Cromptoms, The Sides, The Stevens, The one and only George Carroll, have no apology to offer management in our desire to promote the welfare of Our People.

From the various departments, plants, etc. over a period of years, has come the necessary news and information as per subversive activities against We of labor. This information has been a definite milestone in the advancement of Local 659. How the department is being supervised, who are the "Red Apple" boys, who is infringing on contract privileges, who are the would-be dictators in violation of contract language and Federal laws, etc., all these and many more subjects have been covered for the information of the Membership.

Management has scrutinized the various plant news and in line with the rules of common decency and contract provisions have been forced to make

the necessary corrections. "Carry on" you reporters. Thanks a million and let's hope that the Mrs. on the home front will understand our rough banter.

("Thanks Reporters of Local 659," Dec. 14, 1950, p.2)

In December, 1950, International Officers sent a letter to all Flint UAW members criticizing opposition to the Ford Pension Plan. Coburn Walker, writing in The Searchlight, charged that this was a violation of local autonomy:

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.... 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)

On the morning of Decemeber 12, 1950, at 8:30 a.m. a telegram was delivered to Local 659 summoning the officers to appear the next day (Dec. 13) at 4 p.m. before the

International Officers: "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."

When Local 659 officers and the Searchlight 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 contents of the newspaper to be "anti-union."

Editor Greene described the meeting:

Specifically stating, the International Executive Board had us on the carpet December 13, 1950. They had growing pains about Brother Jack Palmer's contributions to the Searchlight, Brother Bert Boone's personal opinion, Brother John Eleazer, the Buster Reporter, the President's Column and last but not least, our Staff Artist, Doc Wilson. They spanked Brother Wilson for his several cartoons and especially about 'Joe Worker' holding his nose as he dropped the 5 Year Plan in a refuse container, and in the next breath, they KISSED him for his contribution about ex-Governor Kelly being raised with oleo or Republican butter.

("Season's Greetings," Dec. 28, 1950)

Greene promised he would not kow tow to pressure from the International, but, "If and when the membership of Local 659 vote their approval or disapproval of our Local publication, I shall bow low in the presence of such greatness or Democracy."

The representatives of The Searchlight asked for a 60 day period to prepare a defense. Their request was denied. The International issued a condemnation of the newspaper. They required that the condemnation be published in the paper and that articles the International found offensive no longer be published. In response Local 659 filed a grievance to be heard at the next UAW 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 and reviewing the kinds of articles that The Searchlight had carried over this period.

Editor Greene summarized some of the achievements of The Searchlight in an editorial published on Jan. 25, 1951:

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 peevess 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.

The Local prepared a document titled "Appeal from Decision of International Executive Board Re: The Searchlight." The document outlined a few of the many questions that had been debated and discussed in "The Searchlight" over the previous few years. In the "Appeal," the defenders of The Searchlight set out the principles they judged to be at stake in the controversy. They wrote:

Since the inception of the UAW-CIO Union in 1937, and even previous to '37 in the dark days of the organizational stage, Chevrolet Local 659 has been in the forefront of the fight to better the working conditions and raise the wages of the workers of the auto industry.... The International Officers have demanded that they set policy for the whole International Union. Local 659 disagrees with them. We believe in rank and file control....

We know and have been given distinctly to understand that we are rebels within the UAW-CIO.... The UAW has always been a dynamic, democratic union as compared to the old AFL unions.... Local 659 intends to retain their dynamic character and the pages of "The Searchlight" will continue to reflect this dynamic position.... The members of Local 659 feel that the International Executive Board is trying to place the entire UAW under a bureaucratic, centralized control. In

all our past labor history, the union bureaucrats have aimed at the suppression of criticism and of opposition, centralization of power in the top leadership and curbing of rank and file democracy and the curbing of local union publications. That is why William Green and his bureaucratic control of the AFL was never acceptable to the auto workers.

("Appeal," p. 18)

The 13th Constitutional Convention of the UAW was held in Cleveland, Ohio on April 1-6, 1951. The Grievance Committee presented its findings on the Appeal of The Searchlight on the last day of the Convention. John W. Livingston, an International Vice President of the UAW, took the floor to explain the Committee's position:

I am not saying that local unions should have any less autonomy than has been their historic right in this Union... I say to you that the Union hall, the Union committee meetings and membership meetings, conferences and conventions are the places for these things. The people whom we talk to in such gatherings have already indicated that they have a certain enthusiasm for the Union by the very fact that they are present at such meetings. But these things that are printed in the newspaper and distributed at random throughout the length and breadth of this land transcend these things.

("Proceedings," 1951, p. 347-9)

Coburn Walker, President of Local 659, made an effort to respond. He explained, "I have a Local Union publication, and I think

that only the people that elected a Publicity Committee, they are the only people that they are answerable to, and... don't forget one thing,... that if this convention does this to my Local Union, and they are able to censor the publication of my Local Union, they will censor yours...." ("Proceedings," p. 351-2).

Then Walker tried to give the floor to a spokesperson from his Local to present the facts in the case. But Emil Mazey, Chair of the Convention, recognized Walter Reuther, President of the International Union. Reuther explained his charge that The Searchlight was "anti-union," describing the opposition to the Ford Pension Plan that appeared in The Searchlight:

That was anti-union, because he tried to destroy the confidence of the membership in the Union by saying the Union was selling out the workers and taking inferior agreements to what the company offered us in 1947....I say if you are trying to build a union and you think something is wrong, you go in and ask the leadership for a meeting and say, 'Look, we think this is wrong and you should do something to correct it.'.... It is simply a matter of how should a local union try to use its paper to advance the cause of our Union, to strengthen it so it can better serve the rank and file. That is the whole issue.

Walker sends out thousands of these things all over the country in bundle orders. Is that to spread good unionism? Do you think when another General Motors local gets this sort of

propaganda that helps build the Union?

No, I say, fellows that we have got to decide -- they can put out 'The Searchlight' in Flint.... but put it out to serve the purpose of local union publications in this union -- to serve the membership, to enlighten the membership and to advise the membership what we are doing in our Union. Yes to criticize the leadership, too, but draw the line between being against ideas and being against people. ("Proceedings," p. 354-5)

When Reuther finished speaking, the question was called and the Appeal from The Searchlight was denied. To protest not being given a chance to offer a defense, Coburn Walker remained standing at the microphone trying to get the attention of the Chair. Chairman Mazey called the Sergeant-at-Arms to escort Walker to his seat or out of the hall.

Just before the Convention was to be adjourned, Reuther admitted: "I think it is unfortunate that the Grievance Comm. had to report out at the tail end of our Convention so that the situation with respect to 'The (Flint) Searchlight' sort of created a bad feeling at the last hours of the Convention." ("Proceedings," p. 369)

An editorial from "Ford Facts" reprinted in the April 19, 1951 issue of "The Searchlight" described 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. It should have because the action taken at the convention involves freedom of the press ---.... The "Searchlight" was spanked ... 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 .... We doubt that the editor of the "Searchlight" is frightened to death and will now remain silent concerning union problems simply because our great leaders have risen so far above us all that they can no longer tolerate honest criticism within the union.... We say that we shall do as we have done in the past. We'll call them as we see them.

(April 19, 1951, p.2)

The Editor of The Searchlight didn't remain silent. The pages of the newspaper continued to feature rank and file views and criticism. The ranks of the Local demonstrated their support for the newspaper in the next Local election when the officers and the Editorial Board who had defended the principle of freedom of the press were re-elected. Editor Greene explained his response to the censorship :

From the machine floor and the production lines has come the news and views of our people, which has been instrumental in promoting the slogan 'we have come a long way together.' The word 'together' seemingly now has a different slant. I shall quote a very high sounding phrase from the Chairman of the 13th Annual convention, quote: 'You can criticize the leadership to your heart's content,' unquote. But

back stage, he is reported to have said, "You do it my way or I'll chop your !x?!z!?" future off tomorrow....'  
( "The Grass Roots," April 19, 1951,p.2.)

This struggle was but one of several waged over the years by Local 659 against censorship. Editor Greene had conducted the debate publicly, in the pages of The Searchlight. The following stanza from the poem, "To the Editor," demonstrates the appreciation of the ranks for the role Editor Geene played in the battle for The Searchlight to be "The Voice of the Searchlight Worker."<sup>2</sup>

So Brother Greene, may I extend  
Congratulations now, my friend.  
Keep up the good work and I know  
Our 'Searchlight' better still will  
grow.

(Harry E. Darr, Sept. 20, 1951)

#### NOTES

- 1) Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes are taken from The Searchlight, the newspaper of UAW-Local 659 (Flint, MI).
- 2) For many years, the masthead of the newspaper read "The Searchlight: The Voice of the Chevrolet Worker."  
(The above article was originally printed in The Searchlight, Feb. 6, 1986)

SHOP PAPER POETRY:  
A Hidden Working Class Tradition

There is a myth popular among American historians and sociologists. It portrays the American worker as living a prosperous, content life, devoid of hardship and struggle. Workers in the U.S., therefore, are seen as "different" from their European counterparts. While the European worker is credited with being part of a progressive tradition and struggle, American workers are said to lack any progressive culture or tradition to attach themselves to or to learn from.<sup>2</sup> The significance of these suppositions and assumptions is that they serve to conceal that workers in the U.S. -- just like those in other industrialized countries -- have a rich tradition and history, but it has been well hidden, and relegated to virtual obscurity.

In industrial and mining centers like Flint, MI, Pittsburgh, PA, Iron Mountain, MI, etc. (to name but a few that a bit of research has uncovered), a militant tradition of poems, exposes, articles, cartoons, etc. has grown up, especially on the shop floor of large scale industry. The auto workers, in their local trade union newspapers of the 1940's and 1950's, provide a good example of this tradition.

By the early 1940's, the growing number of poems and other forms of artistic expression originating on the shop floor, prompted Ralph Marlatt, then editor of The CIO Auto Worker - Flint Edition, to write:

There is a new art growing up in America. A new labor culture is being born. Our writers, our artists,

our singers are the people in the shops. Their art is woven around the shops. It is a culture that is ... a product of the industrial age in which we live.

To illustrate this shop floor culture, Marlatt presented a poem by Floyd Hoke-Miller, an auto worker in a Chevrolet Plant in Flint, Michigan:

Let not the night go down  
Upon our head  
'Til we are fed  
Jewels for our crown --  
Give us this day our bread  
We stand in line and wait  
In direst want  
With bodies gaunt  
Uncertain of our fate  
And wonder why some men vaunt  
About the sacred right  
Of men to work --  
When dangers lurk  
Both day and night  
And the future lies in murk

Marlatt tells how this poem symbolizes a whole genre of working class artistic expression:

"To my desk," he writes, "come poems, poems of real people living real lives. Poems of the line, of layoffs, of hunger, of suffering ... And then I listen to the workers singing. Songs of production, songs of hope, songs of courage."

The poetry Marlatt describes is one of bare-faced honesty. It is a poetry of criticism. The shop floor commentator picks to pieces the horrors and hypocrisy of the

world as it is.

Floyd Hoke-Miller is a fine example of a shop floor poet. He has written literally hundreds of poems about the plight of the worker in the U.S. Most of these poems were written while he worked many years as an inspector at the Chevrolet Plant 4 in Flint, Michigan. His poems poignantly describe the difficult position of the worker. In one such poem called "The Laborer, Yes," the poet writes:

I'll tell you why I take this stand  
To praise the one with hardened hand:  
With daily drudge and sweaty smell;  
He's the greatest one in all the land  
And yet the least one in command<sup>4</sup>

In another poem, "A Laborer Looks at Life," this poet tells why he has chosen to focus on the worker:

Still all the hoarded wealth that  
man amasses  
From minted metal to gems that  
radiate  
None was gained without the  
working classes  
To ply their trade with brawn  
and skill create.

The poems by this labor poet tell of the nitty-gritty contradictions faced by the modern industrial worker. New machinery constantly appears on the shop floor. The worker must figure out how to set it up and get it functioning. And then, the reward -- perhaps reduced hours or a lay off with loss of pay -- or at least a greater intensity of work. Using the pen name Evelyn Pierce (one of the several nom de plumes and pseudonyms

## PLANT LIFE

By Doc Wilson, Local 659



he used in his writing), Floyd Hoke-Miller writes:

The Bossman brought a big machine  
And called it automation  
He said that labor cost too much  
And brought about inflation  
The workers set the damned thing up  
And got it in production  
Then he announced with business pride:  
'There'll be a plant reduction.'  
from "A New Name for an Old Evil"<sup>5</sup>

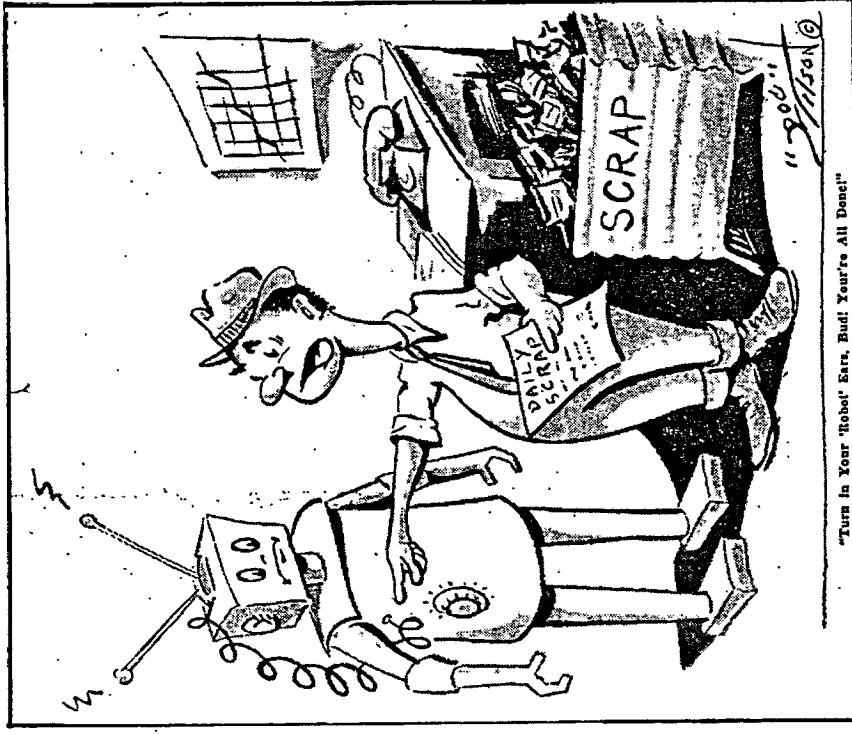
Poet Floyd Hoke-Miller was a sit down striker in the UAW Sit Down Strike in Flint in the Winter of 1936-37. Some of the poems he has written over the years were to honor brother or sister pioneers of the auto workers struggle to win industrial unionism. For example, part of an epitaph he published when one such unionist, Clyde Boone, died, says:

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

When another Sit Downer, Bert Boone died, after many long years of service to the cause of Labor, part of the eulogy the poet wrote said:

You did not wish to rise above  
Nor ride upon your brother's back

Just as the selflessness of individuals was commended, so, too, collective contributions were applauded. The deeds of the "Red Berets," the UAW Women's Brigade, which played such an important role in the victory



of the Flint Sit Down Strike, were sung in verse, as in these lines from the poem "Were You There?":

Did you hear the shrilling  
screams of angry wives  
That dared the slugging blue  
coats with their lives  
And stormed the streets outside  
the factory gates?  
Did you see them break the  
windows glass by glass  
And let escape the blinding,  
strangling force of gas,  
In fighting female fury to  
succor endangered mates?

Though Floyd Hoke-Miller's poems appeared in numerous labor papers over many years, they have yet to be published in a collected edition as they deserve. Now, retired more than 20 years, his contributions, as a warrior (as he puts it) "in the war at the workplace", continue. And it is important to see his work in the context of the tradition of the shop paper poets that he is part of.

The shop papers of locals of unions like the UAW, especially during the 1940's and 1950's, contained poems or verse in their shop news sections, where workers expressed anger or criticism of a foreman, an apple polishing worker, etc. Also, for several years, some UAW locals like those in Flint, MI had a Poet's Corner in their shop papers, where, week after week, they published the poems of various rank and file workers from the local. The concerns voiced in these poems ranged from the devastation of unemployment to the interference with freedom of speech by the International

Officers of the UAW. For example, here is a stanza from a poem called "Unemployment." The poet, H. E. Darr, was an inspector at Chevy's Plant No.4 in Flint:

I walk down the street of the  
city so fair  
In search of employment that  
just isn't there  
For I am a victim, as you  
can see  
Of defense conversion in  
industry.

Another concern -- arising during a controversy between a UAW local and the International Officers of the Union over the question of freedom of speech, and of the press, produced, among others, the following verse:

The contract may be very good  
But do you think it fair  
Altho' there's points that I  
dislike  
My gripes I cannot air?  
from "Criticism Hurts No Man"  
by H.E. Darr

Supervisors, as well as union officials, were the target of criticism by these shop paper poets. In a poem called "To GM Workers," Beulah Smith, a worker writing in The AC Sparkler from Flint, turns her observations of supervision into verse:

If the boss ever gives you a pat  
on the back,  
Don't let it go to your head;  
For the very next day you'll  
get the dirtiest deal,  
Makes you wish that you were dead.

Practically all these shop paper poets used meter and rhyme to comment on and criticize the conditions of their times. One poet explained that meter and rhyme were especially appreciated by the rank and file because the assembly and production work they did had a cadence of its own. Usually, when a new issue of the shop paper appeared, the poet would hear appreciative comments from fellow or sister workers. Free verse was not often used, and when it was, it wasn't as well received. Thus it is not surprising to find this use of meter and rhyme in the verse in other shop papers like that of the Ford UAW Local 952 from Iron Mountain, MI. The poem, "No Wasted Time" published in July, 1950, shows that Management's fondness for robots is no new concern for the auto worker. The anonymous poet writes:

'Twill be a celebration  
For Ford Motor Corporation  
When there appears upon the  
scene  
A worker built like a machine.  
From that day on, I have a  
hunch  
There'll be no need of 'time  
for lunch';  
No relief time for nature's  
call  
In fact, no 'wasted' time  
at all!  
Machines don't fight for  
higher wages  
Join unions, go on strike  
outrageous --  
But on that day, I half  
surmise,  
Machinery, too, will organize

While many poems were playful or sarcastic like the one just cited, some were deadly serious. The poem "The Parents", as many of the period, showed the workers' concern with war and the threat it represented for their children. After describing the birth and boyhood of a child, the anonymous poet writes these couplets:

Years pass by, he's eighteen  
now  
Your babe, your lad, with  
manly brow.  
He questions life, "What's  
this I see,  
The tools of death are they  
for me?"  
"Was I but born to kill  
and slay  
These other lads in bloody  
fray?"

The following poem "Labor" was published in the UNION BANNER, the Iron Mountain Ford UAW paper in October, 1947. It was reprinted in December, 1947 in Local 235 News, another UAW shop paper. This poem speaks directly to those who would deny the day-to-day struggle of the working class or its progressive tradition:

I builded your ships and I  
sailed them,  
I worked in your mills  
and your mines  
I sweat o'er your network of  
railroads  
I crushed the ripe grapes  
for your wines  
I toiled weaving cloth for your  
garments;  
I gathered the grain for your bread,



My hands made your beautiful  
mansion.  
I printed the books you  
have read  
I linked two great oceans  
together  
I spanned your rivers with  
steel,  
Faced death on your lofty  
skyscrapers,  
I builded your automobile  
I harnessed the mad rush of  
waters,  
And caged lightening bolts  
for your play,  
I made your words leap over  
distance,  
I lighted your nights into  
day.  
Wherever there's progress  
You'll find me  
Without me the world could  
not live  
And yet you would seek to  
destroy me  
With the meager pittance  
you give.  
Today you may grind me  
in slavery dictate to me from  
your throne,  
But tomorrow I throw off  
my fetter,  
And stand forth to claim  
what I own.  
I am mighty and you are  
but few,  
No longer, I'll bow in  
submission  
I am Labor demanding  
my due.

Shop paper poets like the author of "Labor" from Iron Mountain, Flint like Floyd Hoke-Miller and the other they are poets provide a voice for the class they are part of. The shop papers from their union locals provided them with a way of disseminating their work to an interested and supportive readership. By providing a voice for working class criticism, this poetry functions as a weapon in the struggle to change conditions. And in the struggle to deal with the day-to-day problems, the image of a more profound change flashes into view, an image of labor no longer enslaved, of "Labor demanding my due."

To those who would deny that there is a working class in the U.S., or that there is a progressive working class tradition -- this poetry speaks out in protest. (And there are also cartoons, editorials, articles, etc.) This poetry is the product of a class, a class with a constant and difficult struggle on its hands.

And while historians or sociologists deny the existence of this progressive working class tradition, the newspapers containing the evidence of this tradition are being coming lost or are being thrown away. Shop papers, though difficult to store and to preserve, appear to have been the sole form of publication open to these bards of the working class. Thus, this voice, this tradition, this history, has been kept highly localized by a publishing industry which prolifically promotes the view of Management -- of the happy (or invisible) worker. One is reminded of the slave owners in the South before the Civil War who were so fond of bragging about their "Happy Slaves."

But a new generation is looking for the lessons of past struggles. The honest, hard hitting and hopeful voice of the shop paper poets of the 1940's and 1950's provides an important source of inspiration and guidance. There are shouldered to stand on when trying to move forward, but they must be the real shoulders of a working class that has for so long been hidden from view.

#### Notes

1. See, for example, the essay collection *Failure of a Dream*, edited by John Laslett and Seymour Lipset, N.Y., 1974 p. 18.
  2. This question was taken up at the 1980 and 1981 Labor History Conferences held at Wayne State University in Detroit, MI.
  3. These quotes are from a column Marlatt wrote called "Nuts and Bolts." An undated copy is included in Floyd Hoke-Miller's papers at the Reuther Archives at Wayne State University in Detroit, MI. The art form that Marlatt observes was in the tradition of newspapers like *Appeal to Reason* and *National Rip Saw*, etc. of the early 1900's.
  4. All of the poems by Floyd Hoke-Miller are contained in the papers he deposited at the Reuther Archives. Most of them were originally published in *The Searchlight*.
  5. Floyd Hoke-Miller has been especially helpful in conveying a sense of the intent and hard work undertaken by the shop paper poets of his generation.
- (The above article was originally printed in *The Searchlight*, April 27, 1984.)

ABOUT THE POET  
from "A LABORER LOOKS AT LIFE: THEN AND NOW"<sup>1</sup>

Poet Floyd Hoke-Miller today continues to write poetry on the issues facing the shop floor worker. He retired in 1963, after 33 years as an auto worker in a GM factory in Flint, MI. Like other auto workers of his generation, he is from a long, progressive, working class tradition. He was reared on newspapers like *The Waco Iconoclast*, *The Appeal to Reason*, *The Industrial Worker*, and *The National Ripsaw*. His father was a Socialist Party supporter who had seen and heard Eugene V. Debs speak in person. The poet's own leanings identified him with industrial unionism and the IWW by the time he was 16. By the early 1930's, he held a union card in the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks. Throughout his many years, his guiding credo, learned from Debs, has been: "When I rise it will be with the ranks, and not from the ranks."<sup>2</sup>

Floyd Hoke-Miller was a Sit Down Striker in the seizure of Plant 4 in the Flint Sit Down Strike of 1936-37. Dubbed the Poet Laureate of his Local, UAW-Local 659, he is a union man who contributed on a regular and frequent basis to his local union newspaper, which provided a vehicle for the publication of his poems and columns.

The 1936-37 Flint Sit Down Strike won auto workers the right to organize industrial, as opposed to craft unions. The continuing struggle for industrial unionism became the theme of this poet's work over many long years. His poetry honors not only the men and women workers who made that victory possible, but it also documents the hard and determined struggle waged by work-

ers like those in Flint to maintain and build on the 1936-37 victory.

NOTES

1. A small collection of poetry by Floyd Hoke-Miller has been printed in a limited edition. It is titled A Laborer Looks At Life: Then and Now.
2. See for example Ray Ginger, The Bending Cross, New Jersey, 1949, p. 17.



THE TRADITION OF LABOR CARTOONING  
AND DOC WILSON

The labor cartoons drawn over the years by Doc Wilson, now a retiree of UAW-Local 659, chronicle how the struggle for industrial unionism has been an ongoing and relentless battle. Doc and his wife Irene remember the depression and the day in 1933 when the notice to start work at GM arrived at the Wilson home. Doc had come home tired after tramping the streets all afternoon in search of work. He hadn't had a steady job for two or three years. When he hired in at Chevrolet on July 13, 1933, working conditions were awful. "It was slave labor," remembered Doc during an interview. "Of course," he explained, "the auto industry was still in its infancy -- you had to start somewhere. But it got worse. It got to the point where people had to rebel."

Doc worked as a truck driver for GM. His own working situation wasn't so bad, but he saw the conditions in the plants and knew there had to be some change. "The day of the strike," Doc recalls, "I came in with a load from Bay City. I knew what was coming, but I didn't know when. After I unloaded, I clocked out and went to the union headquarters."

Doc helped to put out Punch Press, the newsletter which appeared during the Sit Down Strike of 1936-37 to keep supporters of the strike informed of what was happening. Doc's first published cartoons had to appear anonymously. "I really couldn't sign'em in those days," he explains. "They could still fire you too easy."

By the mid 1940's, signed cartoons, like one criticizing the "No Strike Pledge"

appeared in Doc's local union newspaper The Searchlight. Doc's cartoons were regularly featured in other Flint labor papers like The Headlight, (newspaper of UAW-Local 599), and The Flint Weekly Review. Sometimes the cartoon was reprinted, but the caption changed to reflect a slightly different situation. Doc's cartoons were copied and reprinted in labor papers around the country. "I've had cartoons published in more than 200 newspapers at one time or another," notes Doc Wilson.

In 1948, Doc Wilson started a regular cartoon series that he called Plant Life. The chief protagonist of the series is Perry, a "graduate cum laude from the school of hard knocks in factory life." Through his hero, Perry, the cartoonist was able to comment on the dangers and frustrations of factory life. "Sometimes," Doc explained, "the ideas for Plant Life came straight from experience."

Many of Doc Wilson's cartoons were critical of corporate policies and practices. Other cartoons, however, took up to comment on union questions. One cartoon captioned Just Pin Money opposed a dues increase. It got Doc into hot water with the International Union. Another cartoon captioned It Still Smells shows a dissatisfied worker throwing a newly negotiated Ford Pension Agreement into the trash and holding his nose. This cartoon drew the ire of the International Officers of the UAW. "Oh, it was about the time we got our first retirement plan," Doc explains. "It wasn't quite as good as I thought it should be." Despite such difficulties, Doc persisted. He went on with constant and sustained efforts via his cartoons, until pensions, and then the 30



and Out retirement program had been won for UAW retirees. "I guess I realized the need for it years before our leaders did," he explains.

Through it all, Doc Wilson has contributed to a rich tradition of labor cartooning, one that he has helped to develop and spread. Bob Travis, a pioneer organizer and founder of the UAW commented on the importance of Doc's cartoons in the development of the UAW in a letter he wrote to one of Flint's labor papers shortly before he died. "Doc," wrote Travis, "was the cartoonist for the original Auto Worker -- way back, over forty years ago. I've always felt that his cartoons contributed significantly to our victory. To Doc, I'd like to suggest that he publish a book carrying his cartoons chronologically. It would really show the rise of the UAW and the history of all our struggles." (from *The Headlight*, May 31, 1978)

Doc now looks back fondly on his years of cartooning while working as a truck driver at Chevrolet. "Sometimes," he admitted, "I miss my days drawing cartoons .... Sometimes I'd sit up half the night making sketches and then get up to go to work the next morning. But I loved every minute of it."

Doc retired from Chevrolet in 1968 on the UAW pension that he was so active in fighting for. Upon his retirement, the staff of *The Searchlight* made him an honorary lifetime member of the Local's Publicity Committee so that he "be allowed to continue to work with future committees in the years ahead." (See "Resolution" *The Searchlight*, Feb. 29, 1968, p. 2) Doc is now trying to pull together the many cartoons he drew over

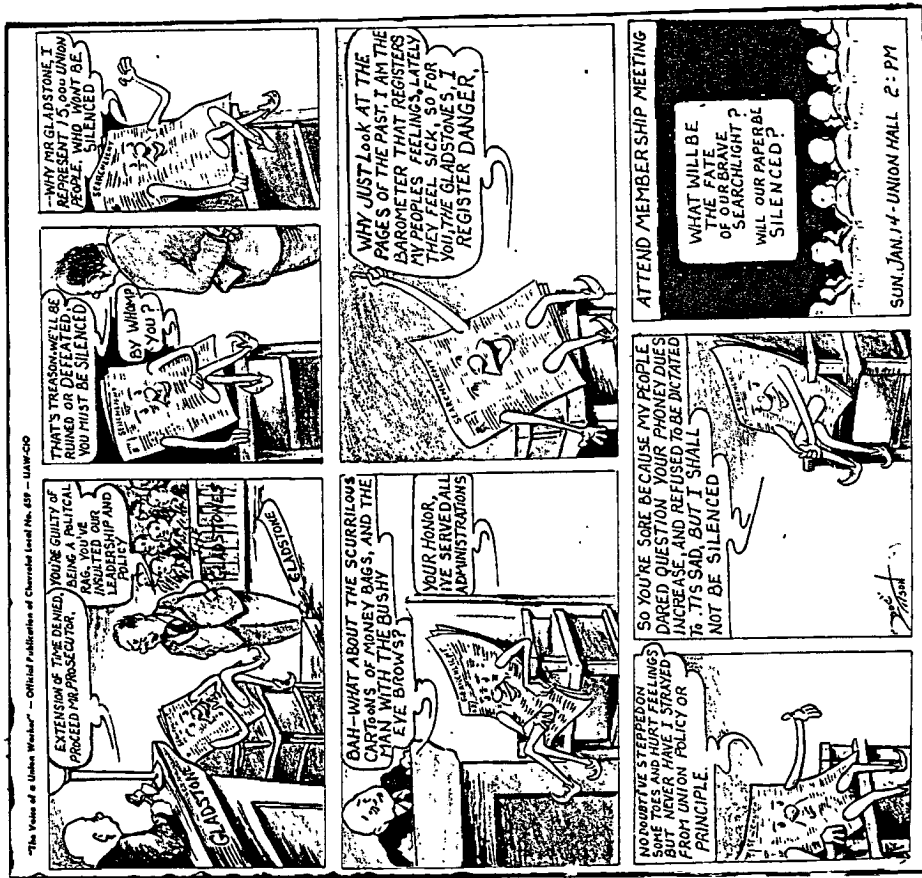


**PLANT LIFE** . . . by Doc Wilson, Loccl 659

**IT STILL SMELLS**

the years to put them into some more permanent form. "You know," he said, "a lot of these could still be used today 'cause there's still a lot of people suffering."

(The above article was originally printed in The Searchlight, May 25, 1984.)



**PLANT LIFE.**

By "Doc" Wilson



No, I'm not ready for my pension! It's just this darn speedup that makes me look that way.

"Doc" Wilson ©

**Voted Most Likely To Succeed**



June, 1960, thousands of our young men and women will graduate and become part of the already burdened labor market to compete with automation.

"Doc" Wilson ©

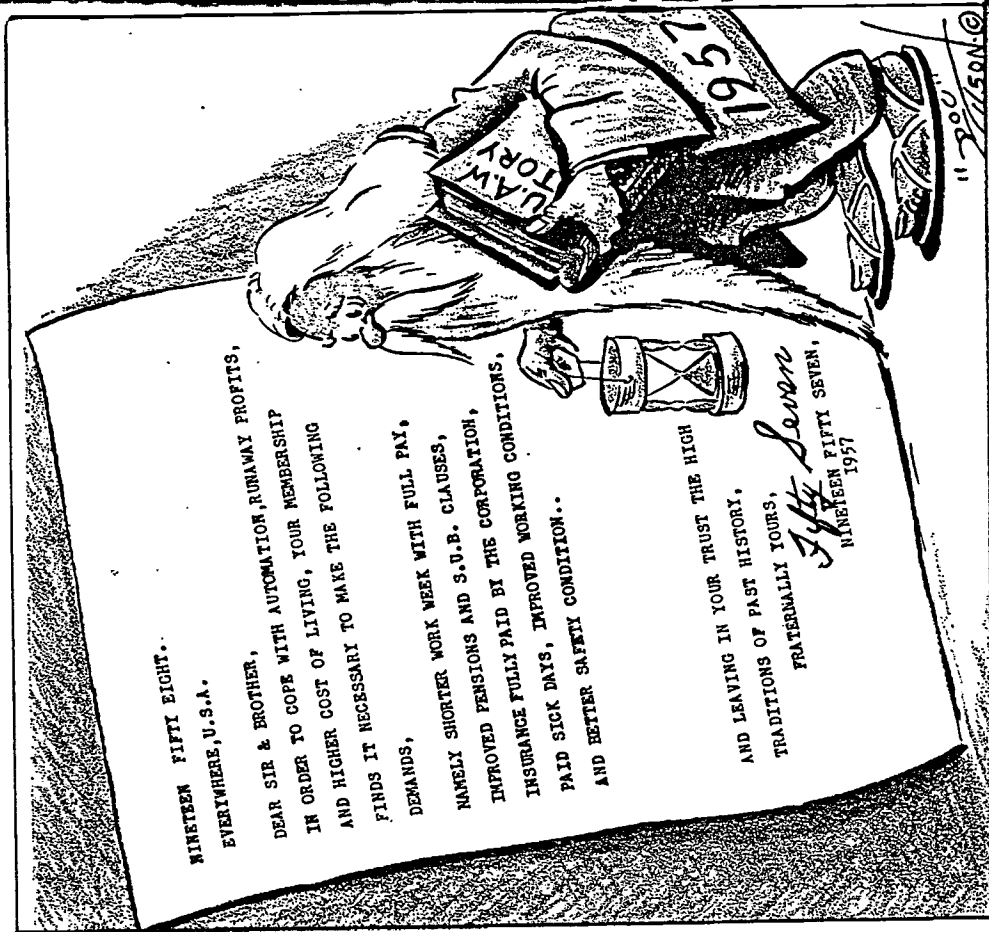
EPILOGUE  
By Floyd Hoke-Miller

In retrospect, after fifty years experience in the Congress of Industrial Organization, I still say, WE'VE COME A LONG WAY BABY! Gains on the surface, but subtle losses, in the deeper aspect of revolutionary unionism.

I am glad we profited by the foresight and conscious endeavor of the sage and sane, capable Industrial Union defenders that broke away from the old Committee for Industrial Unionism of the AFofL structured brotherhood of the Bourbonic-Bismarkian type that supported the Guilds, Crafts, or Trades as a basis of cohesion.

Yes, we've gained a lot on the surface, contractual rights, human environment and the economic leverage of COLA (based on BLS), Fringe Benefits and the smiling recognition, even if they have requested forfeiture and in some cases taken back some, that the working element is human. And I am thankful that we still have a nucleus of layer-on-layer unionism even if the old CIO has prostituted itself and gone back to bed, in a clandestine manner, with the AFofL.

To be sure, I'm sad. I'm cynical, because we've sold our birthright for a mess of porridge. What we've really got now is the same old thing we started with; the same old thing the vested interests tried to sell us as a bribe to avert the honest, the real, collective bargaining vehicle we finally won after a long-fought bitter battle: That is paternalism and largess on the premise, "papa knows best!" This is historically emphasized by the cry of "Birdog Charlie",





in his "What is good for GM is good for the Nation." Also by the sardonic query of "Assembly Line Bill", "What has the menial worker got in common with the skilled tradesman?". Then on another instance of the common capitalistic feeling of divide and conquer, "If we must have unions, let us have a thousand and one." The more things change, the more they remain the same. Now they've imported Oriental Paternalism of Japanese style, with a kimona that would flatter a Dior, and most people do not seem to recognize the fact for what it really is.

Along with all the other disturbing elements of the 51st State of the Union, C O N F U S I O N, a new nomenclature for Capital-Labor relations to assist in amalgamating the socio-economic, Fascist-style: viz, Man, Management, Government (what a Troika), Hi-Tech, Lo-Tech, No-Tech, QWL, Man on the Board, Profit Sharking and I'd like to add one of my coinage, Iron Collar to go with the White-Collar-Blue Collar and a host of others to further confound the issue.

But, as A.J. Muste prophetically wrote early in 1936: "The automobile workers will write other significant, dramatic, fateful chapters in the history of the American working class."

#### NOTES

1. C. E. Wilson is known as the originator of "What's Good for GM is good for the nation."

WE'VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY!  
the fiftieth anniversary of the CIO)  
By FLOYD HOKE-MILLER

the brainchild for a better earth,  
in sacrifice and anguish we gave it birth,  
its praise with pride and weigh it's worth.  
We've come a long way, baby!

Stand up and show your will to fight  
For Common Cause, for Labor's right:  
Don't be ashamed of your collective might.  
We've come a long way, baby!

"Through" cookies won what you have got,  
Don't let tender victuals lose your lot.  
Public fan the fire of "we will not."  
We've come a long way, baby!

War is seething at the working place,  
When robots winning the Human Race!  
Don't give in, slow not your pace.  
We've come a long way, baby!

Things look dark as Joseph's cave  
But you're not ready for the grave,  
Possessions you've won you must save.  
We've come a long way, baby!

Notes: This poem is intended as a sequel to  
the poem written in the early 1940's called  
"Through Cookies".)