“A Rank and File Union Built by the Rank and File”
Toledo, Progressives, and the Rise of the UAW
1933-1937

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

BACHELOR OF ARTS WITH HONORS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

March 31, 2008

Advised by Professor Countryman

For my loving and supportive parents

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank everyone who has encouraged me along the way, as well as the support and guidance of Professor Carson and Professor Countryman. Also I want to thank my dad as well as my friend Adri Miller for all the time they spent reading and editing my thesis.

INTRODUCTION

Joe Ditzel, a member of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) Federal Labor Union (FLU) local #18384, described his local as a "rank and file union built by the rank and file." The fact that they had this "strong union…in Toledo wasn't due to anything the AFL did" but what "the workers [did]…themselves."[1] His sentiments reflects the grassroots energy and action that shaped this auto worker union local and made it "the beacon light for automobile workers throughout the country" before the establishment of an International United Auto Worker (UAW) union in 1935.[2] During that time, as Ditzel described it, they "more or less had the idea that anything that had to be done, [they would] have to do it [themselves]."[3] That attitude of self-reliance was rooted in the origins and development of the FLU local marked by struggle and rank and file militancy and activity.

This thesis focuses on that historical narrative from the perspective of the workers within FLU local #18384. From this bottom-up approach, one sees the social and community dynamics from which these individuals interacted with and drew strength from. This local dimension reflects what Staughton Lynd calls "alternative unionism" that he claims existed before the formation of the labor federation Congress of Industrial Organization in 1935. This model of organization, according to Lynd, was characterized by grassroots, community-oriented, democratic entities, rooted in local autonomy. As an FLU local with little institutional support from the national AFL, the formation and development of this Toledo auto worker union was based on the grassroots energy of its membership in relation to a left-wing influence and the community.

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[1] Joseph Ditzel, interview by Tana Mosier, March 5, 1981 and April 16, 1981, p. 47 of transcript, Blade Rare Book Room, Toledo-Lucas County Public Library.
[2] Burke Cochran, "Dillon to Pack Convention of Auto Workers," *New Militant*, Aug. 34, 1935.
[3] Ditzel, interview with Mosier, March 5, 1981 and April 16, 1981, p. 48, Blade Rare Book Room.

Receiving its charter in August of 1933, the FLU local #18384 was, in part, a product of President Franklin Roosevelt's National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) – his first New Deal Initiative to counteract the economic and social impacts of the Great Depression. Passed in June 1933, section 7(a) of this legislation proclaimed the right of workers to organize and collectively bargain with employers. Although the text of section 7(a) was poorly worded (and ultimately, poorly enforced) this historic government sanction of unionism inspired an outburst of labor organizing across the country. Following the passage of NIRA, the AFL, a federation of all the trade unions in the US, sought to take advantage of this unionizing impulse by announcing a campaign to organize workers in the auto industry. Steeped in conservative craft unionism (organizing workers along particular trades or occupations in various industries), the AFL brought these auto workers into federal labor unions with the plan to eventually parcel them out to its various trade unions. These auto worker federal labor unions had a direct relationship with the national AFL but little contact between one another.

The history of this Toledo local as a federal labor union that precedes both the creation of the International UAW and the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) makes it an ideal case study in the growing debate among scholars over Lynd's notion of "alternative unionism."[4] He argues that this horizontal organizational model was supplanted with the emergence of the CIO and its top-down inclinations. This in turn became a missed opportunity for the labor movement during the 1930s as it shifted towards national bureaucratic unionism. Historian Elizabeth Faue, in a similar line of thought, argues that

[4] (1997) "'We Are All Leaders': A Symposium on a Collection of Essays Dealing with Alternative Unionism in the Early 1930s", *Labor History*, 38:2, 165 - 201

"working class activism" of the 1930s was "local activism" that stayed away from "established bureaucratic union structures."[5]

This thesis argues that the grassroots, community oriented struggle of "alternative unionism" that defined the origins of FLU local #18384 became the basis for broader national struggle within the auto industry. As the historian Rosemary Feurer argues, "any national framework of unionism required building solidarity at the local level" in which "the union movement needed to be able to address the local structuring of the political economy to confront effectively the power of capital at the national level."[6] Much has already been written about both the 1934 Auto Lite strike and the 1935 Toledo Chevrolet strike, as they were critical moments in the development of the broader labor movement in the automobile industry during the 1930s.[7] But the local dimension underlying these important episodes (and which this study seeks to illustrate) has yet to be fully examined.

In this respect, the events of the 1934 Auto Lite strike culminated in a community uprising and a potential general strike which successfully challenged the power structure of business hegemony over the city's economy. This subsequently forced the Auto Lite Company to sign a collective bargaining contract with the FLU local. The efforts of a rank and file group within the local #18384 allied with the Lucas County Unemployed League (LCUL) galvanized the community through mass civil disobedience to eventually defeat a devastating court restraining order on picketing initially accepted by union leadership. Moreover the turn towards mass civil disobedience ushered in the subsequent turn of events

[5] Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering & Struggle* (Chapel Hill:London: The University of North Carolina Press 1991), 12.
[6] Rosemary Feurer, *Radical Unionism in the Midwest* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 2006), 234.
[7] Sidney Fine, *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963) 283, 402, Sidney Fine, "The Toledo Chevrolet Strike of 1935,", *Ohio History* 67 (1958): 326-356; Irving Bernstein, *Turbulent Years: a history of the American worker* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 223

that created ultimate victory for the FLU local in the form of a signed contract with the Auto Lite Company. This outcome also reinvigorated the broader labor movement in Toledo.

The militant cadre of active rank and file members that emerged from the conflict of the second Auto Lite strike in 1934 became the progressive element within the Toledo auto worker union. They were shaped in some fashion by the Auto Lite strike experience as well as their ties with LCUL and the Workers Party to form what historian David Montgomery calls "the militant minority" those who "endeavored to weld their workmates and neighbors into a self-aware and purposeful working class."[8] Individuals within this group, in an atmosphere of renewed organized labor activity in the city, became the catalyst for organizing the Toledo General Motors (GM) Chevrolet plant as well as the subsequent strike there in 1935. The walk out which successfully stopped operation in this key transmissions plant and shut down GM production in plants around the country gave the action national implications. Moreover, during this time, the Toledo strikers initiated an effort to coordinate nationally among GM FLU locals for a common strike policy in order to obtain a shared agreement.

When this initiative was squashed by both the AFL national leadership and local #18384's executive board, the progressive elements among the rank and file of #18384 turned to the broader rank and file movement involved in creating an International United Auto Worker (UAW) union based on a democratic, bottom-up model controlled by membership. With that institutional support more or less in place, the rank and file initiative to obtain a national agreement from GM that began during the Toledo Chevrolet strike of 1935 reached a climax with the victorious Flint sit-downs of 1936-1937. Both in the period leading up to, and during, that historic conflict, leaders and members of UAW Local 14

[8] David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor* (Paris: Cambridge University Press, 1987),2.

(formerly the Toledo Chevy unit of the FLU local #18384) played a crucial role in supporting the effort.

However, during this period, the activism of progressives within the FLU local was rarely uncontested. As James Roland, one of the leading progressives in the Toledo union put it "there were some of them that were conservative and reactionary and we were progressive…that's the way it was."[9] During the Auto Lite strikes, some members. especially on the executive committee, distrusted the presence of the left wing groups. Such attitudes spilled over in the months following the Auto Lite strikes when the progressives, some of whom still had ties with the LCUL and the Workers Party, attempted to extend their influence by running slates of candidates during elections for both shop committees and the executive committee. During that period, the AFL national increased its influence on the executive committee, at the request of union officers, through the presence of its representatives to help work out the factionalism and through its control of funds supplied to the local. The 1935 Toledo Chevrolet strike further demonstrated the division and clash between progressives and parts of the executive committee. Following the establishment of the UAW International, indifference on the executive committee towards the interests and needs of the Chevrolet unit as it faced efforts by GM to undermine their union led to that shop's petition for a separate charter. As Local 14, the progressives came to the fore in leadership of the union and could push forward their desire to get a national agreement with GM as well as support organizing efforts around Toledo.

Through this rank and file history of the Toledo FLU one gets a local understanding of what became a developing grassroots movement among auto workers underlying the

[9] James Roland, interview by Tana Mosier Aug. 12, 1981, p. 88 of transcript, Blade Rare Book Room, Toledo-Lucas Country Public Library.

creation of the UAW International. This, in part, is what made the Flint sit-down strikes so successful and brought instant legitimacy to the organization. Bob Travis, one of the primary organizers of this historic struggle, emerged out of the Toledo Chevy strike as a member of its shop committee and drew his early inspiration and influence from Roland to get involved and his interest in left wing politics. Moreover, historian Sidney Fine asserts that "the UAW did not expect to win the GM [Flint] strike by the use of words but rather by the mobilization and deployment of such power…available…to put maximum pressure on the corporation."[10] Local 14 provided one of the primary bases of membership support to reinforce the efforts taking place in Flint at moments when such help was needed both inside and outside the plants. The rank and file energy emanating out of Toledo to support this national effort can only be understood by examining the successful struggles that entrenched the presence of organized labor on the local level.

[10] Sidney Fine, *Sit-down: the General Motors strike of 1936-1937* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 206.

CHAPTER ONE: "A Community Uprising"
Emergence of the FLU local #18384, Radicals and the Auto Lite Strikes

Introduction

American Federation of Labor Federal Labor Union local #18384 formed in 1933 in Toledo, Ohio. It emerged during a period shaped by both local as well as national events. The Great Depression had sparked the June 1933 passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) in June, a federal initiative to address the economic woes of the country. Section 7(a) of the NIRA was particularly important for the cause of organized labor in the US for it seemingly solidified the right of workers to organize and collectively bargain. Though poorly worded and enforced, the measure sparked an outburst of union organizing in various industries across the country. It encouraged the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the only federation of labor unions in the US at the time, to tap into this union sentiment by undertaking a formal organizing drive within the auto industry. Steeped in conservative craft unionism (organizing workers along certain trades and skills), the AFL sought to organize the auto workers into temporary federal labor unions (FLU) with the plan to divide up into the various AFL trade unions. On the local level, Toledo was hit quite hard by the Great Depression with large pockets of unemployed workers. The city had experienced an especially widespread bank collapse due to the build up of faulty loans and investments for over a decade. At the time, organized labor within the city was especially struggling after

over a decade of union busting at the hands of the city's business elite, the collapse of their union-run bank, and rising unemployment.

The FLU local #18384 emerged from these troubling economic conditions having formally attained its charter in August of 1933 with an amalgamated structure (having more than one shop under a union charter). Beginning in the Willys-Overland plant, the FLU local, driven by the grassroots energy of its members, expanded to several auto part plants by February 1934 including, most importantly, the Electric Auto-Lite plant. This company was one of the largest independent auto part suppliers and with an openly hostile management towards organized labor became the union's first real test. Auto Lite shop committee, which only had one department organized, joined in the FLU local's first walkout on February 23, 1934 along side Bingham Stamping, Logan Gears and Spicer Manufacturing.

During that five day strike, few Auto Lite workers actually participated in the action and only about fifteen walked the picket line. But their numbers were reinforced by supporting Spicer workers who made up the largest portion of those involved in the walk out and eventually succeeded in including them in the temporary agreement that ended the strike. This settlement though very minimal, provided a partial victory for each of the FLU local shops involved with small wage increases and a thirty day period to negotiate final agreements with their employers which subsequently strengthened the union presence in their respective plants. In the Auto Lite plant, this outcome helped the shop committee organize most of the workforce but management opposed any attempts at negotiations and had hired more workers and bought a cache of munitions during the strike in preparation for a showdown.

On April 13th as management remained intransigent to collective bargaining, the Auto Lite union members voted to go on strike and 400 workers walked out. Though only a minority of the workforce participated, sympathizers including various left wing groups, the unemployed and others within the FLU local helped build up their picket line in its first few days. Moreover women, of who were a majority of the employees in the Auto Lite plant, became much more active and involved during this second strike on the picket line. The Auto Lite Company, drawing on violent outbursts on the picket line between strikers and strikebreakers, immediately turned to the courts for an injunction against the strike. Judge Stuart, who oversaw this injunction suit, called for a restriction on picketing to limited number of individuals allowed as well as banning all nonunion personnel from participating. Moreover, since much of the police were sympathetic to the strikers, to enforce the restraining order Sheriff Krieger, on the advice of Judge Stuart, appointed special deputies. The FLU local officers subsequently complied with the judicial ruling and turned their energy towards fighting the injunction suit in the court room.

But for the FLU local membership, such compliance was devastating. By early May, numbers on the picket line were dwindling down and the Auto Lite company continued to bring in strikebreakers. At that point, a group of FLU local members sought out Lucas County Unemployed League (LCUL), an organizing arm for the radical left wing American Workers Party, for assistance. As a result, an alliance between the two groups was built to redirect the strike towards breaking the restraining order through mass civil disobedience. On May 7th, after writing an open letter to Judge Stuart about this decision two days, the two officers of LCUL and two union members jump-started the action by getting arrested in violation of the court ordered picketing restrictions. In the following weeks the numbers of

individuals involved in this civil disobedience grew as the Sheriff continued to make mass arrests. At the same time, the court room during the trials for prosecuting those violators became public forums for mobilizing mass support for the strikers. Such acts galvanized the broader community as numbers on the picket line by late May grew to the thousands. Moreover the city couldn't continue to bear the costs of the Sheriff's mass arrests limiting the enforcement of the restraining order.

On May 23rd, in face of this growing crowd, Sheriff Krieger, with the encouragement of the Auto Lite company, to enforce the injunction more vigorously bombarded them with tear gas to disperse the picket line after the crowd charged forward in response to a steel rod thrown from the factory that struck a woman. This act increased the crowd on the picket line which subsequently surrounded the plant and refused to let the people inside leave. In response to this siege, the Auto Lite company urged the Governor to call in the National Guard and he in turn complied with this request. The National Guard, composed of young soldiers, with the mission of escorting out the workers and dispersing the picket line, faced a hostile crowd that resented their presence. Eventually the soldiers and the picket line clashed as each side charged on one another and the national guardsman threw tear gas at them. After many wounded and two killed, the fighting ceased after May 26th and with Auto Lite production now effectively stopped, negotiations began between the union and the company. By June 2nd an agreement was reached in which the Auto Lite management conceded union recognition among other things and ratified by membership on June 4th.

Along side this growing militancy on the picket line from the beginning of May onward was that, at least in rhetoric, of the broader Toledo labor movement through the AFL body the Toledo Central Labor Union. As time went on sentiments among the Toledo Central

Labor Union (CLU) affiliates for a general strike grew. The leaders of this AFL body, many of them older with memories of the business assault on organized labor in Toledo during the 1920s following the failed Overland strike of 1919, feared that a lost strike at the Auto Lite plant would have the same effect. By May 30, 95 of the 100 trade unions affiliated with the Toledo (CLU) had voted in favor of a general strike. The fact that this Auto Lite strike became a focal point for the city's labor movement increased the significance of its positive outcome.

Thus the initial small strike and the second longer, dramatic strike at the Auto Lite Factory became formative experiences for Local 18384. In both struggles, but especially the latter one elements of solidarity among workers, the presence and influence of left wing groups, and the support of community and women were important to their successful outcomes for the FLU local. During the second strike these factors helped the union successfully challenge the Toledo city economic and political power structure that had kept down organized labor in the past and as a result win a contract with the Auto Lite company. This in turn reinvigorated the energy and activity of local organized labor. Internally though the strike experience left lingering ideological questions within the FLU local with the emergence of a progressive element among its rank and file.

Foundation of AFL Federal Labor Union local #18384 and organizing in the Auto Lite Plant

The emergence of the AFL Federal Labor Union local #18384 in Toledo, Ohio and the ensuing Auto Lite Strike of 1934 that solidified its presence took place amongst the backdrop of events occurring both on a national and local level. The onset of the Great Depression in 1929 and President Roosevelt's National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) in

June of 1933 that sought to counter-act the widespread economic devastation of the Depression jumpstarted a nationwide union organizing drive. Section 7(a) of NIRA establishing the right for workers to organize and collectively bargain, though ambiguously worded and poorly enforced, provided the spark for this outburst.[11]

The American Federation of Labor (AFL), announcing an organizing campaign following this legislation, sought to channel this unionizing impulse in the auto industry. The AFL, rooted in a tradition of conservative craft unionism (organizing workers within various industries along the lines of their craft or trade), clumped these workers into federal labor unions (FLU) with the plan to eventually parcel them into the various AFL trade unions. Considered "wards" of the AFL, the FLUs lacked the trade autonomy prevalent in the other unions of the Federation. Although these locals usually elected their own leadership, the AFL exerted direct control over much of their activities as well as their strike defense fund. Collectively, they were referred to as the United Automobile Workers (UAW) Federal Labor Unions though, initially, they had no relationship with each other creating coordination problems between the locals.[12]

Within Toledo, the Great Depression, especially the failure of the banks, hit the city hard. During the 1920s, Toledo had led the nation in manufacturing employment growth. But economic disaster struck by 1931 when five of Toledo's largest banks failed, turning the city from the leader in job growth to that of job loss in the United States. This disaster in Toledo was rooted in the confluence of the city's developing and banking interests who, through their influence over the city and state government, had facilitated and financed a massive real

[11] John Barnard, *American Vanguard : the United Auto Workers during the Reuther years* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), 44.
[12] Sidney Fine, *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 142-143.

estate bubble. In the years leading up to this bubble, the business community had united under the Merchants and Manufacturers Association to follow the lead of the national Open Shop Association in an assault on the city's organized labor (which in 1919 consisted of one fifth of the Toledo work force). Beginning with the Overland strike of 1919 which was successfully put down by a court injunction, during the 1920s "the united front of government and business succeeded in breaking the back of the labor movement in Toledo." When the real estate bubble burst in 1931 with the accumulation of poor long-term investments and loans, those major banks failed and wiped out $100 million dollars of assets that they controlled as well as other small town banks in the area. One small bank particularly impacted was American Bank, founded and controlled by many Toledo craft union locals that pooled their assets and membership dues. The city's financial collapse wiped out their treasury, severely limiting their routine activities as they faced large wage cuts from Toledo employers and increasing unemployment. [13]

By the time the UAW FLU local #18384 was chartered in 1933, the general disarray of organized labor in Toledo was quite apparent. The city was considered by then as "a notorious cheap-labor, 'scab' town" while still being "the glass and auto parts center of America."[14] Despite these conditions, local # 18384 emerged following NIRA in the Willys-Overland auto factory after it re-opened in 1932. The union "literally mushroomed overnight" at the Willys-Overland plant when, after an initial organizing drive, management heeded to their first ten demands, especially pay for overtime work. [15] Though the Willys-Overland auto company remained in economic dire straits with limited employment until

[13]Timothy Messr-Kruse, *Banksters, Bosses and Smart Money* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2004), 22- 88.
[14] A.J. Muste, *Organized Labor and the Automobile Industry* (Baltimore: Christian Social Justice Fund, 1936), 37.
[15] George Addes, interview by Jack Skeels, June 25, 1960, p. 4 &5 of transcript, UAW Oral History Collection, Walter Reuther Archives, Wayne State University

1936, it became "the backbone of the organization" when local #18384 began expanding into other auto parts plants in the city.[16] In August of 1933, when it received a federal labor union charter, the local had organizing bodies within five auto parts firms: Spicer Manufacturing Company, City Auto Stamping Company, the Electric Auto Lite Company and its subsidiaries Bingham Stamping and Tool Company, and Logan Gear Company.

The passion and activity of its members fueled Local #18384's expansion. The local had a central executive committee as well as individual shop committees in each company that pushed forward the organizing drive. Though there were officially elected positions within the union (such as president, business agent, and financial secretary), the organizing fervor trumped hierarchical structure. As one member of the executive committee, Frank Grzelak, described it at the beginning, "there wasn't no officers…there were just organizers" who "had [their] heart in it…to get things organized and get the working people to get better working ideas and better wages."[17] Such fervor among the founding members to build up the local and its membership occurred with little support from the AFL. The organizers within the union came mainly from the plants seeking its support and mobilized other workers around them. Union democracy accompanied the grassroots organizing within the local. The various plant units that joined the union decided on their own governance and elected committees to draw up a constitution and various by-laws as well as selecting officers. Decision making on such rules and regulations along with creating additional ones came from the voice of membership.[18] Thus, as an amalgamate local, through democratic control at

[16] Phillip A. Korth and Margaret R. Beegle, *I Remember Like Today* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1988), 145.
[17] *Ibid*, 145-146.
[18] *Ibid*, p. 146

the factory level, each plant unit could assert their own identity and influence over the manner in which the union would run at least on the shop floor.

The structure of the local itself also played a crucial role in its future success within Toledo. By bringing together various local auto part plants into one union, the local created cross-company bonds that inculcated a sense of solidarity in the face of employers, especially those determined to crush their union. This was especially true in the case of the union organizing drive that took place at the Auto Lite factory. Furthermore, it unified these workers in a shared purpose for which they could, at a local level, express their collective interest with one voice in these independent auto parts and assembly companies in Toledo.

The Auto Lite factory, as one of the largest Toledo employers and independent auto parts suppliers, would decide the fate of the FLU local in the city and became its first test as a union. The company manufactured auto parts, electric equipment for automobiles as well as assembly line replacement parts that they sold to automobile assembly companies like Ford and Willys-Overland (later to become Jeep). As an independent auto parts supplier, Auto Lite had to keep the prices of its products low in order to maintain steady business and contracts from the auto manufacturers. [19] Such a drive to maintain low prices contributed to an autocratic, harsh work regime for containing labor costs by maximizing worker output through a piecework process known as the Bedeaux system which emphasized worker speed through production quotas. The massive unemployment in the city during the Great Depression further strengthened managerial control over the work force through acts of favoritism, gender discrimination over pay and work, sporadic employment and work hours and constant surveillance.[20] To top it off, the company paid below the National Recovery

[19] *Ibid*, 39.
[20] *Ibid,* .47&48.

Administration (the department for implementing NIRA) code minimum for wages in the auto industry. Such conditions combined with the inspiration of NIRA's section 7(a) made the factory ripe for organizing among workers.

A unique character of the Auto Lite plant's workforce, in comparison to the rest of automobile industry, was the fact that it was made up by a majority of women. In the entire industry, women constituted about twenty percent of employees in auto part plants but the Auto Lite's workforce was, according to one estimate, about 72 to 73 percent female. [21] Furthermore management's use of gender discrimination over job assignment divided production into "woman's work" and "men's work" concentrating them into different departments within the plant where under the piecework system the latter got a higher base rate of pay.[22] Thus any successful effort to organize the plant would require attracting the women as well as the men into the union.

But uncertainty was at the heart of the initial effort to unionize the Auto Lite Factory. Few of the workers in the factory had any experience with labor unions including the group of punch press operators of Department Two where organizing began around the fall of 1933. Furthermore, Auto Lite management had thoroughly inculcated an atmosphere of fear towards union membership among much of its work force. Many of the punch press operators were initially scared to get involved in union activity because, as one of them put it, they "knew that if [they] did anything in the shop that [they'd] get fired one by one so fast."[23] But with the encouragement of Charles Rigby, a punch press operator and lead organizer, and

[21] John Barnard, *American Vanguard : the United Auto Workers during the Reuther years* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), 24; Phillip A. Korth and Margaret R. Beegle, *I Remember Like Today* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1988), 56.
[22] Phillip A. Korth and Margaret R. Beegle, *I Remember Like Today* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1988), 56, 63.
[23] *Ibid*, 74

section 7(a) of NIRA which seemingly cemented their right to organize and collectively bargain, five of these workers met regularly, in secret, to discuss forming a union. After contacting officials from the Toledo Central Labor Union, these five individuals signed membership cards for the newly formed FLU local #18384. They then covertly spread the word and signed up the rest of the approximately one hundred employees of their department. The women in Department Two, Charlie Rigby recalled, were especially eager to join the union because they were "just so mad [about their working conditions] that they'd done anything."[24] They subsequently elected a shop committee with Rigby as their chairman to meet with management. Despite the quick progress the union had made within the plant, there was little chance that Auto Lite management would listen to their demands. At their first meeting, Arthur Minch, the vice president of the company threatened the shop committee that they had "at least a million dollars to break [their] union." This first encounter was an early indicator of the extremes that the Auto Lite company was prepared to go to avoid recognizing, negotiating with, or even signing a contract with an independent labor union. Thus an initial display of union strength was needed to change management's intransigent position.

The First Strike

By February of 1934, Local #18384 had a relatively solid base of membership as a result of the organizing that took place at the various auto-part companies in Toledo. They even had a signed contract with City Auto Stamping ("the most completely organized" at the time) that included union recognition, a substantial wage increase, seniority rights and an 8

[24] Ibid, 217.

hour work day.[25] Following the actions of Spicer Manufacturing Company's president Charles A. Dana to arrange a company union within their plant, the local planned walk outs at the Logan Gear Company, the Bingham Stamping and Tool Company, as well as at the Auto Lite Company to get them to accept a uniform agreement for a ten percent wage increase, seniority, union recognition, and equal pay for women for equal work.[26]When these demands were rejected by the companies, the Local 18384 went out on strike beginning on February 23, 1934 for five days bringing 3600 workers out of the factories. [27]

In the Electric Auto Lite factory, with only one department organized and an apparent intransigent position of management against recognizing their union, the organizers were anxious to integrate their members into the upcoming strike. Rigby convinced the local's business agent Tom Ramsey that even though their whole factory wasn't organized yet, if their department was shutdown the rest of the factory wouldn't be able to produce.[28] As a result, Rigby brought the Auto Lite's union nucleus into a united front with the workers from Spicer, Bingham and Logan for a shared agreement from their respective employers. But the Auto Lite workers that actually walked out represented only a fraction of those on strike during this time. Roughly fifteen workers there walked out and manned their picket line along with fifty others, mainly outside of Department Two, who just stayed at home.[29]

Both the amalgamated structure of Local #18384 as well as sympathy of other AFL trade unions contributed to the partial success of the strike, especially for the Auto Lite

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[25] Addes, interview by Skeel, June 25, 1960, p. 5, UAW Oral History Collection; Letter from Thomas Ramsey to William Green, Feb. 3, 1934. American Federation of Labor records, microfilm collection at the University of Michigan.
[26] Sidney Fine, *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 207, 479
[27] *ibid*, p. 207
[28] Phillip A. Korth and Margaret R. Beegle, *I Remember Like Today* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1988), 218.
[29] *Ibid*, 81.

members. With few people participating in the walk out from the Auto Lite plant, Spicer workers reinforced their effort by providing support to maintain their picket line. The Spicer employees composed the largest proportion of the local's strike with about 2000 walking out.[30] They provided Auto Lite workers with supplies such as coal to make fire for warmth and tents to allow them to keep a presence outside of the factory.[31] The other AFL trade union locals including the International Association of Machinists (I.A.M) and the International Brotherhood of Blacksmiths, Drop Forgers and Helpers as well as the independent union Mechanics Educational Society of America (M.E.S.A) walked out alongside the FLU local in these factories. The railroad unions, in sympathy with the strike, refused to carry goods into the Auto Lite yard, forcing the company to haul goods in by truck. A Federal conciliator, Hugh D. Friel, helped negotiate a temporary agreement which he convinced the FLU local to accept and end the strike on February 28th. But it was not without prodding from employees of the Spicer plant, the only shop that had shut down their plant, who successfully demanded that the Auto-Lite strikers be included or they wouldn't return to work. [32] Furthermore, the support from other AFL trade unions during the first strike within these factories foreshadowed the broader support that built up among organized labor in Toledo during the second strike.

Despite their initial strong interest in Department Two, no female Auto Lite workers participated in the walk out. Though there were women workers that "were 100 percent" union supporters, they remained "sympathizers after work." These female Auto Lite

[30] Sidney Fine, *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 207.
[31] Phillip A. Korth and Margaret R. Beegle, *I Remember Like Today* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1988), 85
[32] Phillip A. Korth and Margaret R. Beegle, *I Remember Like Today* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1988), 85; Sidney Fine, *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 207&208.

employees brought food after work to the homes of those who were picketing.[33] The fear of repercussions (including being replaced) for openly participating in union activity was a main factor for such covert support among women workers as it was for many other workers in the Auto Lite plant. That initial hesitancy towards open union participation among female Auto Lite workers may also have been a result of the gender origins of the union within the plant. The core male organizers that formed the union nucleus within the plant from Department Two emerged because, as one of them put it they "knew that [they] could trust one another" in the face of management hostility and company spies.[34] This group, which they affectionately referred to themselves as "the unholy thirteen," may have been an additional obstacle to female involvement in union activities as outsiders to that male social circle. [35] George Addes, then the financial secretary of the local, claimed that Auto Lite was initially a difficult plant to organize because of its sizeable female workforce since "women seemed to feel that a union was an organization for men."[36] It was that tie amongst the "unholy thirteen" which, in part gave them the courage to participate in the walk out along with two additional sympathizers and walk the picket line. That gender dynamic shaped the subsequent large scale organizing drive once the first strike was settled within the plant. According to an office worker within the Auto Lite plant who later became an active member of the local, during this time, "men responded first" and the departments "where they had almost 100 percent female help" were "some of the last that were organized."[37] Though the male-oriented origins of the local within the Auto Lite may have been an initial obstacle to

[33] Phillip A. Korth and Margaret R. Beegle, *I Remember Like Today* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1988), 85.
[34] *Ibid*, p.88
[35] *Ibid*, p. 84
[36] Addes interview by Skeels, June 25, 1960, p. 5, UAW Oral History Collection.
[37] Phillip A. Korth and Margaret R. Beegle, *I Remember Like Today* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1988), 95

female involvement, once the union got on its feet following the small victory of the first strike, women would take on a crucial role in ensuring its firm establishment through the second strike.

Though the walkout ended in a settlement that fell far short of what the local was demanding, the strike strengthened the local's position within each of the shops that had participated. This was especially true in the Auto Lite factory. Even with an initial limited organized presence and participation in the strike, the event allowed the union to gain further traction and legitimacy among the workers by producing a tangible, though incomplete victory. The settlement created a truce which reinstated all striking workers, provided an immediate five percent wage increase for each shop, and a thirty day period for shop floor negotiations between the local and the companies by April 1st. Thus, as a result, the FLU local was, in the words of one of the Auto Lite organizers, able to get their "foot in the doorway as the union…[but] just [their] toes in [at] the Auto Lite."[38] The Auto Lite shop committee subsequently organized most of the Auto-Lite factory into the local union and in turn emboldened them to demand more from the company.

Second Strike and the formation of the picket line

The settlement that came out of the first strike had only a limited impact on Auto Lite management's hostile stance toward organized labor within the plant. They continually refused to bargain with the local's shop committee headed by Charlie Rigby as well Tom Ramsey, the local's business agent. At the same time, while the local was organizing more and more workers there, management hired new workers and secretly purchased over $12,000 worth of tear gas and arms in preparation for another potential strike.[39]

[38] *ibid*, 86
[39] *ibid,* 10 & 219

On April 13, 1934, as attempts at negotiation with Auto Lite management continued to fail, 400 workers walked out of the plant. Bingham workers had gone on strike on April 11th and Logan Gear employees followed on April 17th. Despite the fact that the walkouts at each site attracted significant number of workers, all of these factories remained in production and hired strikebreakers. At the Auto Lite plant, 400 of the 1700 workers came out on strike. A leadership group of about twenty five FLU local members, the most active individuals, formed the core of the subsequent Auto Lite factory picket line.[40] Within this core, captains were designated to serve as leaders of the picket in effort to coordinate the picket line. The local had plenty of other volunteers to reinforce the picket line "from all the different plants in Toledo." [41] In addition to sympathizers from within the FLU local, those formerly employed at the Auto Lite plant as well as left wing groups including, most prevalently, the Lucas County Unemployed League (LCUL) led by Sam Pollock and Ted Seleander reinforced the picket line. By April 17th, Auto Lite vice president Arthur Minch complained in court about the presence of the LCUL who had gathered "more than nine hundred men lined six deep on the sidewalks" in front of the plant.[42]

The LCUL, unlike the other left wing groups that tried to get involved in the strike, had ties with those in the FLU local at the time. Formed in July 1933 as an organizing arm of the Conference for Progressive Labor Action (CPLA), which subsequently became the American Workers Party, the National Unemployed League (NUL) emerged as a militant organization for the jobless. In Toledo five months later, Seleander and Pollock founded the LCUL which fought for better treatment for the unemployed through direct action efforts to

[40] *Ibid*,163.
[41] *Ibid*,145.
[42] Roger Hall "Sam Pollock and the National Unemployed League in Toledo, 1932-1936," *Northwest Ohio Quarterly* 65, no. 3, (Summer 1993): 110.

gain improvements in the city's relief system.[43] Such activity brought it into close contact with Toledo organized labor. As Pollock wrote many years later, during that time "the constant shifting of employed into unemployment and the reverse established a close bond" between the two groups, both in Toledo as well as other locations that NUL existed.[44] Moreover, LCUL also organized the jobless to support the strikes of employed workers.[45] Within the FLU local, James Roland, a trustee on the executive committee was the main liaison between the LCUL and the auto union. An ex-employee at the Toledo Chevrolet plant at the time when he was fired in March, 1934 for union activity, Roland joined the LCUL after he met Pollock and Seleander at the welfare offices. With an interest in doing "anything that would help the underdog," he became quite active in LCUL.[46] Pollock also had a tie to the auto union as an organizer for FLU local #18384 in 1933 when he worked at Logan Gear Company as a part time bookkeeper. But he was subsequently fired and blacklisted when he was caught by supervisors carrying union membership applications.[47]

The second strike saw female workers expand in their involvement and role in union activity. Female workers from the Auto Lite factory served as a particularly outspoken, fearless and aggressive element of the picket line. The union's previous success in challenging Auto Lite following the first walk out provided them with the encouragement to fight for their right as workers. As John Jankowski, an Auto lite organizer, put it when the walk out in April came, "women were more active in some spots [on the picket line] than the men" because "they knew they had a backing." Up until then the female workers "were all

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[43] *Ibid*, 104.
[44] Sam Pollock, "A.J., the Musteites and the Unions," *Liberation*, Sept./ Oct. 1967,19 (found in Box 9, folder 21 of Sam Pollock Collection, Center for Archive Collections, Bowling Green State University)
[45] Irving Bernstein, *Turbulent Years: a history of the American worker* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 221.
[46] Roland, interview by Tana Mosier, Aug. 12, 1981, p. 6, Blade Rare Book Room.
[47] Roger Hall "Sam Pollock and the National Unemployed League in Toledo, 1932-1936," *Northwest Ohio Quarterly* 65, no. 3, (Summer 1993): 109.

quiet and just looking over their shoulder and watching."[48] According to one striking worker's estimate, there were more women on the picket line than men. As the strike progressed, as one female Auto Lite production worker observed from her time within the factory during the walkout, more and more joined the picket line.[49]

Women, both the striking workers as well as wives of those picketing and of union leaders, became an important linchpin between the picket line and the community. The community orientation of the union, in addition to their hardships within the Auto Lite workplace, may account for women's fervent involvement in the strike. As Faue argues in *Community of Suffering & Struggle* a major factor in determining women's participation in the labor movement has been the level in which it was rooted in the community.[50] The Auto Lite workforce was mainly Polish who lived in the same neighborhoods together. As a Toledo policeman on patrol during the strike observed, around 75 percent of the working population lived in a neighborhood together north of Cherry Street. The community-based identity of the union brought out whole families and friends to bolster and support the picket line, especially once civil disobedience against the court-ordered picketing restriction moved into action. [51] On the picket line, they engaged in an array of activities to support the strike effort including signing up workers for union membership, cutting and supplying wood for fires. [52] Women also set up soup kitchens in the union hall to provide meals for the striking

[48] Phillip A. Korth and Margaret R. Beegle, *I Remember Like Today* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1988), 149.
[49] *Ibid,* p.138
[50] *Community of Suffering &Struggle*, p. 4
[51] Phillip A. Korth and Margaret R. Beegle, *I Remember Like Today* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1988), 115-116.
[52] *Ibid,* 168.

workers. Even when the violence broke out later on in the strike, as one picketer admitted, the women "fought just as hard" as the men.[53]

The Injunction suit and resistance

On April 17th, Auto Lite Company, following incidents of violence between strikers and strikebreakers on the picket line, turned to the courts in an attempt to put a legal stranglehold on the FLU local and its strike with an injunction suit.[54] Several judges passed over this suit before Judge Stuart who, as one prominent lawyer in Toledo described him, was an "old Republican warhorse" and a "drunkard" who was "totally committed to the [pro-business] Republican hierarchy" of the Toledo judicial system took up the case.[55] Stuart immediately declared a restriction on picketing to no more than fifty people at the Auto Lite plant, twenty five at the Bingham plant and prohibited picketing by nonunion personnel which explicitly excluded the Socialist Party, the Lucas County Unemployed Council (a Communist led organization), and the Lucas County Unemployed League. A long court battle ensued between the FLU local and the Auto Lite Company over the potential injunction. The AFL as well as the Toledo Central Labor Union were brought in to provide legal assistance. With the Toledo police, many of them sympathetic to the strike, unwilling to disperse the strikers and enforce the restriction, Lucas County Sheriff David Krieger appointed 150 deputies (non of which had police experience), paid and supplied by the Auto Lite Company to disperse the strike.[56]

As the prospects for a successful FLU Local's walkout waned by early May, disillusionment among the strikers with their union leadership set in. Ramsey's decision to

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[53] *Ibid*, p. 146.
[54] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 275
[55] Edward Lamb, interview with Paul Yon, August 28, 1980, p. 11 of transcript, Edward Lambs collection, Center for Archive Collections, Bowling Green State University; *I Remember Like Today*, p. 107.
[56] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 275

comply with the restrictions on picketing and to turn to the court room to fight the Auto Lite company's suit and arbitration through the Automobile Labor Board (which the company rejected) demoralized members of the FLU locals. Such actions had reduced the picket line to the point "where they would be lucky if there was one or two picketing." [57] Thus the Auto Lite employment office remained open and the company brought in 1800 new workers. Moreover on May 7th, MESA, whose 62 members controlled the tool and die room in the Auto Lite plant, returned to work after walking out with the FLU local when management threatened to move the die shop out of town. This threat along with the hopeless condition of the strike at this point led MESA president Chapman to admit that they "[felt]…that the strike [was] lost."[58]

This devastating decline in the prospects for the striking workers prompted a group of FLU local members to take action. These "progressives" (who among them was James Roland) sought to take the situation into their own hands with a desire to use more aggressive and militant action in order to win the strike. As Roland put it, they felt that they "had to do it on the bottom" to fight not only the company during the second strike but also "reactionary labor leaders" like Ramsey and Floyd Bossler (FLU local #18384 president) who as the official conductors of the effort had allowed the walk out to deteriorate as well as the indifferent national AFL leadership that "didn't none of [those people] help" them.[59] Subsequently, this group of FLU local members, most likely on the suggestion of James Roland, turned to the Unemployed League when "several Auto Lite stewards and members

[57] Roland, interview by Mosier, August 12, 1981, p. 10 of transcript, Blade Rare Book Room, Toledo-Lucas County Public Library.
[58] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 277; letter from Leo Power to William Green, May 14, 1934, American Federation of Labor records
[59] Roland, interview by Mosier, August 12, 1981, p. 10& 15 of transcript, Blade Rare Book Room, Toledo-Lucas Country Public Library.

of the local" visited their offices.[60] Then, during a meeting of 25-30 individuals from the FLU local explicitly excluding Ramsey, James Roland, along with two people from the Auto Lite Factory, (Earl Stucker and Norman Myers), and Sam Pollock and Ted Seleander, took on the leadership of the strike. They formed the LCUL anti-injunction committee and planned to purposefully break the court-ordered restriction on picketing.[61] Louis Budenz, the executive secretary of the American Workers Party and an experienced strike leader, whom Pollock later described as "one of the best strike strategists on the labor scene," had been in constant contact with Pollock and Selander at that time.[62] Before the meeting of the LCUL and the union members, Budenz wrote to the LCUL leaders urging them to purposefully violate the injunction claiming that such an act would be "the deed that [would] set off the fireworks" to win the strike.[63] This decision would be a turning point in this labor struggle. Those involved in this plan knew what was at stake as Roland noted that if it wasn't "a winning strike the labor movement would be set back quite a few years in Toledo."[64] Charles Rigby, who spoke at that meeting, expressed the militant sentiments of those there asserting that he was "a law-abiding citizen" but they were "going to break this injunction" because they "haven't anything to lose; [they have] got it all to gain now."[65] The desperation in face of the possibility of losing this strike had agitated these union members alongside the radical Unemployment League to take civil disobedient direct action. That meeting set into motion the subsequent defiance of the strike injunction as well as increasing the American Worker Party's influence within the FLU local.

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[60] "A.J., the Musteites and the Unions," Sam Pollock, p. 20, *Liberator*, Sept./Oct. 1967
[61] *ibid*; James Roland, interview by Jack Skeels, Sept. 25, 1960, p. 10 of transcript, UAW Oral History Collection, Walter Reuther Archives, Wayne State University.
[62] "A.J., the Musteites and the Unions," Sam Pollock, p. 20, *Liberator*, Sept./Oct. 1967
[63] "Toledo-A Miniature Rehearsal For the Workers' Revolution," *Labor Action*, June 15, 1934.
[64] Roland, interview by Skeels, Sept. 25, 1960, p. 9, UAW Oral History Collection
[65] *I Remember Like Today*, p. 220.

The effort to intentionally violate and break the court-ordered picket restrictions became a rallying point for community support of the second strike for it revived mass picketing. On May 5th, in a public letter to written Judge Stuart which explained their decision to violate the injunction, Pollock and Seleander jumpstarted the initiative towards militant direct action. Two days later, alongside Norman Myers and Carl Leck, both members of the FLU local, Pollock and Seleander, carried out their act of defiance. Pollock and Seleander held a sign that read "Unemployed League Violates Injunction" announcing their civil disobedience while the union members had one that read "Violate Court Intervention with Mass Picketing."[66] They were arrested for contempt of court but let out on bail provided by Ed Lamb, their attorney.[67] Upon release, they returned to the picket lines with more union members. By May 11th, the picket line had swelled to over a hundred. On May 14th, Judge Stuart issued a temporary injunction against mass picketing and restraining certain nonunion individuals, and he then issued a permanent one on the next day.[68] But enforcement of that measure proved difficult in the face of an energized opposition. Arrests continued on the picket line with 107 picketers arrested on May 15th and 46 more on the next day.[69] By then, even Thomas Ramsey, though he'd been officially critical of the role of outside groups in the strike, had turned against the court by calling for mass picketing in spite of Stuart's decision.[70] But the city couldn't continue to engage in mass arrests because of the costs it entailed. Sheriff Krieger informed Judge Stuart that he was reluctant to continue arresting violators because they would destroy jail property and were too costly to feed.[71]

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[66] "Workers Demand General Strike as Toledo Crisis Reaches Climax" *Labor Action*, June 1, 1934.
[67] *Turbulent Years*, p. 222, "Workers Demand General Strike" *Labor Action,* June 1, 1934
[68] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 277&278.
[69] "Sequence of events in Toledo battle," *Labor Action*, June 1, 1934.
[70] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 278.
[71] "Sam Pollock and the National Unemployed League in Toledo, 1932-1936," Roger H. Hall, 111

Moreover, the courthouse became a public forum for those arrested for violating the injunction to mobilize mass support for the strikers as well as for various left wing groups. On May 11th Pollock and Seleander aimed to turn the first trial stemming from their arrest on May 7th into "a showdown fight" for the "indictment of capitalism and capitalist courts." On the day before the trial, they organized a mass demonstration outside the courthouse during which Seleander spoke of the need to break the court-ordered restrictions on mass picketing. During the trial, with a courtroom "jammed with workers," both Seleander and Pollock turned their case into a stage for grandstanding to appeal to the working class audience. The questions directed to each of them became moments to give speeches denouncing various things including wage-cutting, unemployment, and capitalist courts. Despite being found guilty, the four violators had their sentences suspended based on "misconceptions" of the points of the injunction.[72] Subsequent trials over violations of the picketing restrictions were scenes of mass demonstrations where workers and strike sympathizers packed the courthouse as well as crowded outside. On May 18th Judge Stuart faced resistance when he tried to prosecute a contempt case against only twenty four of the forty six arrested, including the five leaders. Before the trial, those arrested held a meeting in the jail and refused to let only some of their numbers stand trial, chanting a slogan "forty six or nothing."[73] In the courtroom filled with hundreds of union members and sympathizers, after Ed Lamb, the lawyer for the picketers, insisted that all the defendants be tried together, the chant "46 or none" broke out. Eventually a heated argument broke out between the strikers and the Auto Lite attorneys. Pollock and Seleander (who were again among those standing trial) were arrested again in contempt of court for disrupting their own trial. In response, the crowd, in Lamb's words,

[72] "Workers Demand General Strike," *Labor Action*, June 1, 1934.
[73] Roland, interview by Skeels, Sept. 25, 1960, p. 11, UAW Oral History Collection.

"lifted [Pollock and Seleander] to their shoulders and bore them off as heroes" out of the courtroom.[74] Such disregard for the court was in part because of Judge Stuart's behavior. Judge Stuart, a well known alcoholic, "fortified himself" for the court sessions for the prosecution of injunction violators with a bottle of whiskey.[75] Such conduct, in addition to picket restraining order, gave further ammunition to Pollock and Seleander's denunciation of the "capitalist court" and its lack of concern for the rights of workers and the issue of union recognition. By late May, other leftist leaders, including A.J. Muste and Louis Budenz as well as those from the Communist party and its Unemployed Council, had gotten into the action by trying to get arrested, attain prominence and "become a leader of the working class of America."[76] The aggressive thrust to violate and break the court restraining order on picketing through mass mobilization both on the picket line as well as in the courthouse ensured that, in Lamb's words, "nothing was settled by the injunction."[77] This meant that the Auto Lite company couldn't legally put down the strike through the local court system.

Furthermore, the turn to direct action to violate the injunction galvanized the broader community in Toledo. At the time, as one person put it, "Toledo was going wild in union recognition" as many people got behind the striking workers.[78] On May 21- May 23, crowds of up to 6,000 people gathered on picket line in front of the Auto lite plant to hear speakers from the American Workers party, including Louis Budenz as well as the FLU local. An important reason for this up swell of support was that the president of the Auto Lite company, Clement O. Miniger, was a very unpopular man in the city because of his banking connections. As the director of the Ohio Bank and a leading shareholder in both the Ohio and

[74] "Sam Pollock and the National Unemployed League," Roger Hall, 111
[75] *ibid*.
[76] *Ibid*, p. 110.
[77] *I Remember Like Today*, p. 111.
[78] *ibid*, p. 150.

the Security-Home banks, Miniger was "an important symbol of the city's financial oligarchy." Though these Toledo financial institutions were among the largest to collapse in 1931 taking millions of dollars worth of deposits with them and triggering the Great Depression in the city, Miniger and his Auto Lite Company were able to withdraw their own savings on the last day of their operation. [79]A popular sign on the Auto Lite plant picket line explicitly points to the criminality of Miniger's involvement in Toledo's banking mishaps asserting "We Don't Need Dillinger [a notorious bank robber at the time]—We Have Miniger." Budenz, fully aware of this sentiment, in his first speech in front of the Auto Lite plant, on May 21, labeled Miniger "Toledo's Public Enemy No. 1." He later wrote that "nothing [else like that designation] evoked such [a] community response."[80]

More importantly, in terms of the role of the community during this time, many people within Toledo were aware of the broader importance of the Auto Lite strike. Some that came out to the picket line were there just to observe the spectacle taking place. But others, like John Toczynski, a resident in Toledo during the second strike, came to support the picket line after work because they felt that they "were all fighting for a cause…the working man's cause" since "it was about time that the working man had something going his way, instead of always the other way."[81] These strike sympathizers were people both employed and unemployed as Margaret Byrd, a wife of an Auto Lite organizer, noted "that had worked and didn't get fair play [and] should have had more money." [82] The union struggle became a working class struggle in Toledo. The Auto Lite Company and its President became the symbol of the entrenched business elite in Toledo. By overcoming the

[79] *Banksters, Bosses, and Smart Money*, p. 145.
[80] "Sequence of Events in Toledo Battle," *Labor Action*, p. 3, June 1, 1934, "For an American Revolutionary Approach," Louis Budenz, p. 17, *The Modern Monthly*
[81] *I Remember Like Today*, p. 120.
[82] *I Remember Like Today*, p.163&164.

company's opposition to the union in the courts through an energized partnership between a group of FLU local rank and file and the LCUL, the fight had transformed into what Budenz later called a "community uprising" against the hegemony of Toledo business elites who had, since the Overland Strike of 1919, dominated and dictated much of the city's economy.[83]

Though the left wing elements became an influential part of the second strike, they weren't fully accepted by some within the local. During the first walk-out, according to a letter that a worker in the Spicer plant wrote to AFL President William Green, "Communists" tried to "horn in" and gain influence over the strike but with a "strong, intelligent shop committee" and local officers that were "honest, level headed and fair-minded men" such efforts "did not stand a chance in the world."[84] In the second strike, though there were various kinds of left wing groups that came, most workers on the picket line saw little distinction between them, clumping all those outsiders as "communists."[85] On the executive committee of the local there were those suspicious of these "communists" as one member put it, though "they always acted like they were 100 percent for the union…but their main purpose was organization for Communist purposes" so "that's why…Local 18384 wouldn't have nothing to do with them at all."[86] According to that executive committee member, if the local found any members or officers belonging to or even close to a Communist organization "they would get rid of them in a hurry."[87] Thomas Ramsey, the business agent and nominally in charge of the second strike, was also critical of the presence of the left wing forces in the local. During the injunction suit hearing, Ramsey blamed the violence taking place on the

[83] "For an American Revolutionary Approach," Louis Budenz, p. 17, *The Modern Monthly*

[84] March, 15, 1934 Letter from Leo Power to William Green, American Federation of Labor records
[85] *I Remember Like Today*, 143.
[86] *ibid*, 147
[87] *Ibid*, 148.

picket line on "those damn communists."[88] Among the organizers in the Auto Lite shop committee some were uneasy with the presence of the "communists" namely Selander and Pollock especially as they were perceived as "anti-religion."[89]

The Battle of Toledo

Despite this large community support for the striking workers, the company remained determined to break the strike. The Merchants and Manufacturers Association as well as various leaders in the automobile industry gave their support for the company's anti-union stance. The latter group advised Miniger that they would "back him to the limit in his defiance of labor unions" which indicated the broader significance these powerful business figures attached to the potential outcome of this strike within the auto industry.[90] During that three day period, the company hastily added to their supply of arms with $11,000 worth of munitions and augmented Krieger's force of special deputies with additional Auto Lite workers who had either stayed at work or had been recently hired.[91] Then on May 23rd, the day after a clash between picketers and strikebreakers had broken out, with encouragement from the Auto Lite company to enforce the injunction more energetically, Sheriff Krieger "decided to take the offensive" in dispersing the picket line with deputies stationed on the roof and in front of the plant. After a woman on the picket line was hit with a steel rod tossed from the plant, violence broke out between the picketers and the deputies as the pickets surged forward in outrage and attempted to storm the plant to attack the person who threw it.

[88] *Toledo News Bee*, April 27, 1934
[89] *I Remember Like Today*, 154
[90] *Turbulent Years*, 225.
[91] "Sam Pollock and National Unemployed League," 111; *I Remember Like Today*, p. 11.

The deputies on the factory roof responded with a barrage of tear gas bombs and those in front armed with clubs and iron bars unleashed fire hoses on the crowd. [92]

Pushed back across the street from the factory, the pickets were now determined to halt production in the Auto Lite plant by surrounding it and refusing to let the strikebreakers leave. The sheriff's act had not only strengthened the resolve of those on the picket line but it brought out more sympathizers to reinforce their numbers. As one of the Auto Lite organizers put it, once Krieger had brought out the tear gas "all of Toledo started gathering from all these other factories" especially from Spicer and Willys Overland as well as the unemployed which was "where [they] got [their] help, [their] sympathy," from these people "that didn't even think of a union."[93] The next day, May 24th, when Ohio governor George White called out the national guard to disperse the picket line and escort those in the plant home, the soldiers, all quite young, were met with a hostile crowd. Resenting their presence, people on the picket line began hurling insults at the soldiers, and rocks and bricks soon followed. From then until May 26th, the "Battle of Chestnut Hill" raged outside the plant in a series of clashes between the guardsmen and the picket line as each charged on one another. The outcome, which marked the climax of the second strike, was many wounded and one person on the picket line killed after a guardsman opened fire on the crowd. With all the workers brought out of the plant, Auto Lite production was effectively shut down and direct negotiations between the company and the union, under the aegis of federal mediators, began. Finally on May 31 after several days of negotiation, an agreement emerged between the union and the Auto Lite management and subsequently ratified on June 4th. [94]

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[92] "Ideological Radicals, The American Federation of Labor and Federal Labor policies in the strikes of 1934" (diss.), William Haskett, p. 182; *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 278; *I Remember Like Today*, p. 11.
[93] *I Remember Like Today*, p. 152.
[94] *Ibid*, p. 13

The General Strike and Toledo Organized Labor

Paralleling the renewed militancy on the picket line in early May in face of the court-ordered restrictions was the growth of support from Toledo organized labor through the Toledo Central Labor Union (TCLU). As an AFL labor body, described by A.J Muste as "less reactionary and bureaucratized" than similar ones in other cities "but not in the remotest sense 'Red'" the TCLU became increasingly energized by the developing strike.[95] On May 3rd, the TCLU adopted the recommendations of its committee of twenty-three, which represented all the affiliated craft and trade unions in the city, instructing union members not to cross the strikers' picket lines, protesting the restraining order against mass picketing and the possibility of a general strike to protect trade union interests in the city. The editorial written in *The Union Leader*, on the following day, the official newspaper of the Toledo Central Labor Union reflected a new sense of urgency and militancy with the TCLU. As "an appeal to all workers, employed and unemployed, union and non-union" the editorial interpreted the restraining order on picketing as an act of class warfare for which "the so-called partnership between capital and labor has broken down" if it ever existed. The injunction was seen as a larger effort among "the employing class of Toledo" for "making a final desperate fight to eliminate organized labor" despite their legal standing under the NRA. These employers, like Auto Lite management, had sought to divide workers by encouraging "strikebreaking and violence and then through the press, place the blame on the strikers." Workers, then, must respond with a united front forgetting "all minor differences and fight concertedly…for the right of labor to organize and have such organizations recognized" in order to "advance the cause of [their] class, the working class."[96] More

[95] A.J. Muste, "Trade Unions and the Revolution," August 5th, 1935, *New International*
[96] "Workers of Toledo!" *The Union Leader*, May 4th, 1934.

specifically, leaders within the Toledo Central Labor Union felt that the city's Chamber of Commerce and Merchants and Manufacturers Associations, with their long history of brutal union busting, were the main culprits behind this initiative "to have a temporary and later a permanent injunction served on the trade union movement in Toledo." [97]

By May 15th as the struggle in the courts continued over the legal injunction as well as clashes on the picket line, talks emerged in the Toledo Central Labor Union over whether to declare a general strike to achieve a settlement at the Auto Lite plant. Toledo Central Labor Union utilized its committee of twenty-three, which had been appointed to generate funds for the striking workers, to take a general strike vote with the locals affiliated with the CLU. By May 31, an overwhelming number of unions, around 95 of the 103 unions, had voted in favor of a general strike.[98] AFL President Green, who didn't support the strike from the beginning, responded to this sentiment with great disdain. He saw the leaders of the Toledo CLU as individuals "to counsel and advise with the workers [in the city] regarding strike action and to use [their] influence to prevent strike action at a time when conditions were unfavorable." Though the provocative acts of the Auto Lite management "may be very great" the workers should "exercise good judgment" in this situation because a general strike, in Green's opinion, should not be carried out "except under the most grave circumstances and conditions." Since the Toledo CLU wasn't playing the conservative voice that Green wanted in this situation, he sent Coleman Claherty, an AFL organizer from Akron, Ohio, to go to Toledo to serve as an advisor because it was clear to him "there [was] need for wise

[97] Letter from Otto Brach to Frank Morrison, May 4th, 1934, American Federation of Labor records of FLU local 18384 (on microfilm at the University of Michigan)
[98] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, 280

counsel and the exercise of good judgment."[99] Otto Brach, the Toledo CLU's secretary, responded to Green by arguing that the local "conditions here [were] desperate" to stop "the constant onslaught of the employers in the court" and that "no one being away from this city can even comprehend the activities of the united Merchants and Manufacturers' Association" in Toledo.[100] The general strike was the only weapon that Toledo's organized labor had to finally assert its own strength and position within the city's economy. The union leaders within the Toledo Central Union were older men, particularly those in the building trades who had long memories of the city's open shop campaigns of the 1920s, beginning with the defeat in the Overland strike of 1919, under the aegis of the Merchants and Manufacturers' Association.[101] Thus the local circumstances and history in Toledo trumped the cautious and conservative nature of AFL trade unionism to rally the city's organized labor around Local #18384's strike effort.

Talk of general strike within the Toledo CLU led to a parade on June 1 of Toledo trade unions with over 12,000 members participating which was, according to Otto Brach, "one of the largest parades ever held in this city." At the subsequent mass meeting in the courthouse square, 25,000-30,000 people came to hear various speakers. The large attendance at this event demonstrated to the leaders within the Toledo CLU "the solidarity of [the labor] movement in [Toledo]…which will have a decided effect upon any future controversies" pushing the city's labor movement forward "more rapidly than ever

[99] Letter from William Green to Otto Brach, May 17th, 1934, American Federation of Labor records of FLU local 18384 (on microfilm at the University of Michigan)
[100] Letter from Otto Brach to William Green, May 23, 1934, American Federation of Labor records of FLU local 18384 (on microfilm at the University of Michigan)
[101] Roland, interview by Skeels, Sept. 25, 1960,p. 7&8 UAW Oral History Collection; *I Remember Like Today,* 119

before."[102] Yet the mass meeting also indicated the gap between leadership and the rank and file over the general strike issue. Among those invited to speak at this event was A.J. Muste, the radical preacher and head of the American Workers Party, who was quite adamant about the need for a general strike at the time to force an agreement in the Auto Lite plant. But right before the parade, he was notified that he wouldn't be called upon to speak at the mass meeting. Those who did speak at the event stayed away from talk of a potential general strike. However, as Muste observed, "the crowd [at the mass meeting] quickly demonstrated that the general strike was the one thing in which it was interested" and bombarded the speakers with questions about it, but the leaders of the meeting had no answers. Eventually, the uproar in the crowd over this issue threw "the meeting…into turmoil" and most of the Toledo CLU leaders walked out. At that moment, Sam Pollock and other individuals from American Worker Party took control of the meeting and called on the crowd for a general strike that Monday unless there was a settlement of the Auto Lite Strike. [103] Thus whether an actual general strike, despite the Toledo CLU's rhetoric, would have been called was uncertain. But the manner in which the second strike became a focal point for the Toledo labor movement to get behind as part of a larger effort to entrench unionism in the city's economy heightened the importance of a final settlement at the Auto Lite plant.

Conclusion

FLU local #18384 victory in the second Auto Lite strike successfully defied business elite's unquestioned control over the city's political economy. Triggering that final outcome was the decision from a segment of the members within the local, in conjunction with the

[102] Letter from Otto Brach to William Green, June 5, 1934, American Federation of Labor records (on microfilm at the University of Michigan)
[103] "Trade Unions and Revolution," A.J. Muste, August 1935, *New International*

LCUL, to defy not only the city's court system, of which had been a successful means of breaking a strike in Toledo in the past, but their own union leadership that had complied with its restraining order. In the process they were able mobilize sympathizers to take part in mass demonstrations in the courtrooms and on the picket line to expand the struggle towards the broader community and effectively break the injunction. The subsequent attacks on the growing crowd outside the plant instigated by Sheriff Krieger and his special deputies with tear gas and hoses reinforced resolve of many out there and expanded their support. The subsequent siege of the Auto Lite plant and the clashes with the National Guard demonstrated the anger and frustration among those on the picket line that had grown in this struggle that seemed to have no end. But after these violent series of events, negotiations began between the company and the union from which came final contract. During that same period the growing sentiment within the TCLU for a general strike paralleled the broadening mass support for the Auto Lite strike.

This group of rank and file, the "progressives," would continue to extend its influence within the local in connection with the LCUL and the American Workers Party. But the hostility of some towards the left wing presence during the Auto Lite strike ensured that the emergence of the progressives would create internal divisions later on. Despite such opposition, this progressive element would continue to be influential within the FLU local leading up to the 1935 Toledo Chevrolet strike. The bond between this element of the rank and file would be shaped both by their relationship with the left wing as well as the shared struggle during the second Auto Lite strike.

CHAPTER TWO:
Factionalism, progressives, and the Toledo Chevrolet strike of 1935

Introduction

The year between the Auto Lite Strike of 1934 and the next major strike at the Toledo Chevrolet plant in 1935 was a tumultuous period for AFL FLU #18384. Internal strife marked the union local despite its successful organizational efforts in more auto part plants throughout the city. Questions over the local's amalgamate structure, the presence of left wing elements, as well as financial issues created dissension within the union. During that time the AFL became increasingly involved in the internal functioning of the FLU local at the executive committee level usually at the request of those within it. Such internal struggles resulted in the eventual trials of the business agent Thomas Ramsey and president Floyd Bossler and their subsequent expulsion from membership in the FLU local.

Despite these internal struggles, the FLU local was able to mount a successful organizing drive in an atmosphere of renewed organized labor activity. By March they had signed contracts with three more auto part plants. With eight separate shops in the union, the focus turned to the Toledo Chevrolet transmission plant, their greatest challenge. Even though a shop committee headed by James Roland had existed within the Chevrolet factory (part of the mammoth General Motors Corporation) since 1933, it had remained difficult to organize because of management's hostility towards union activity. But in the months following the Auto Lite strike, a series of events both on the shop floor and through the Auto Labor Board (ALB), encouraged workers at the Chevrolet plant to join the union. In late March 1935, an ALB announcement of an April 9th primary election to decide the collective bargaining agency in the Chevrolet plant put a renewed organizational drive into motion.

Though the union never requested the election and some suspected that Chevrolet management was using it as a means of voting in the company union, the elections were seen as an opportunity despite AFL encouragement to boycott them.

The outcome of the election gave 65% of the 2300 votes to the FLU local. Though there was supposed to be a final election on April 24th, the shop committee headed by James Roland, didn't wait to negotiate with management. It formulated a contract proposal that was sent to management on April 16th. By April 20th, after fruitless efforts of negotiation with Chevrolet management, the union members in the Chevrolet plant voted to give the shop committee the power to call a strike for which they planned and set for April 22nd. But instead management reopened negotiations that day in a long session that resulted in a company counterproposal that conceded none of the demands of the union, the shop committee resumed their plan for a walkout the next day.

April 23rd when the strike began, with the help of progressives from other plants within the FLU local, the Chevy workers were able to set up quickly a strong picket line that effectively shut down the plant. Since this Toledo plant was crucial to the national GM production scheme, the impact of the strike was felt across the country. The strike committee sought to capitalize on the national effect of their walkout by encouraging other GM FLU locals to participate as well by sending representatives to various locations. This effort was met with early success as Norwood locals joined in as well as the Cleveland local. More over, by April 30th they wanted to coordinate a joint national strike policy between the locals in order to achieve a shared agreement from GM. Moreover, to combat GM propaganda efforts in the local newspaper and help nationalize the walk out, the strike committee published *Strike Truth* as their bulletin to distribute to other GM FLU locals.

But as Francis Dillon, national AFL representative in the auto industry, became increasingly involved in and took control of the strike, he with the support of the executive committee, sought to localize the walk out. He used his authority to hold back GM FLU locals from going on strike. Many of the GM locals wouldn't walkout until Dillon gave them permission. Among those that he held back from going on strike was the union in the large Buick plant in Flint, Michigan. This factory was crucial in the Toledo strike committee's plan to nationalize the walkout because it would've immediately weakened GM's position.

Within the local, as Dillon's presence increased, divisions between parts of the executive committee and the strike committee emerged over the direction of the walkout. Though initially supportive of trying to get other GM FLU locals to take part in the strike, as the strike committee continued to advance this national aim, the executive committee curtailed its efforts. Moreover, the executive committee attempted to withhold funds from the Chevy strike committee for publishing a second *Strike Truth* though eventually gave in. On the picket line, the business agent Fred Schwake excluded left wing groups from participating.

Despite the detrimental effect the shut down of this Toledo plant had on the rest of its production, GM continued, as a matter of policy, to refuse to negotiate with the union while it was on strike. At the same time, the company was shifting production to other locations and preparing a back to work movement. The latter took the form of the Independent Workers Association (IWA) started by supervisors from the Toledo Chevy plant. They circulated a petition for a return to work based on the company's initial proposal or, if that failed, a secret ballot vote of all the employees on that proposal. During a highly publicized

meeting on May 4th, the leaders of this organization announced that it had 1400 signatures though none of the FLU local members or officers were allowed entry.

In response to the IWA Dillon, fearing the public opinion turning against the Toledo strikers, expanded his control over the walkout. He took the initiative to get a Federal Dept. of Labor administered secret ballot of the Chevy employees. Dillon did this to firmly establish that the union spoke for the majority opinion of employees. The outcome of the vote, held on May 8th, favored the union's position as the company's proposal was readily rejected. GM subsequently reversed its policy and opened formal negotiations with the Chevy strike committee on May 11th. During this 18 hour conference, Dillon seemed anxious to get an agreement regardless of the demands of the strike committee. As a result, the company's proposal that came out of that session was far from desirable. Then on May 13th, during the membership meeting to vote on the proposed agreement, Dillon was initially barred from speaking. After walking out and claiming that the FLU local was no longer in the AFL, Dillon was brought back by the executive committee and allowed to speak. The subsequent ballot voted in favor of the agreement and the strike came to an end.

Through out this period, the progressive group that had emerged during the Auto Lite strike caused factionalism within the FLU local as it attempted to extend its influence through elections both on the executive board as well as on the shop committees. This divide that emerged within the FLU local #18384 in the months following the Auto Lite strike became a strategic rift between the executive committee and the strike committee as the AFL exerted its own influence within the local during the Toledo Chevrolet strike. Moreover, the strike revealed a new impulse for national cooperation among the FLU GM locals to achieve

a common signed agreement with GM - an impulse spearheaded by the Toledo strikers that helped advance the rank and file movement for an International UAW.

Internal Woes

In the aftermath of the Auto Lite strike victory, FLU local#18384 was in quite financial dire straits due to the various expenses that it had incurred during that long endeavor. By July 1934 the local had accumulated over $2000 in legal fees which left a balance of only about $191 in its account.[1] The local thus turned to the A.F.L for financial support, requesting $1000 to pay its lawyer, Brandon G. Schnorf, for representing the union during the court injunction litigation. The FLU, as the union's recording secretary William Siefke pointed out, never "asked for or received any aid from the American Federation of Labor" during the Auto Lite Strike. [2] As such they needed the AFL to help them in "wiping [their financial] slate clean." But other issues besides financial stability were at stake in getting this aid from the Federation. Siefke's letter of request pointed towards other potential troubles within the local "during the coming months."[3] Those problems included "keeping down the left-wing elements" and "stamping out criticism of the American Federation of Labor."[4] Such tasks may have been interrelated since the Communist Party and Workers Party (present during the Auto Lite Strike) had been constant critics of the AFL. Furthermore, such comments hinted to dissatisfaction and disdain within the executive board over the roles that these left wing and dissident groups had played during the Auto Lite strike; especially since the Musteites and Communists had provided aid and support in the

[1] July, 9 1934 Local #18384, Financial Statement, American Federation of Labor records of FLU local 18384 (on microfilm at the University of Michigan).
[2] Letter from William Siefke to William Green, June 18, 1934, American Federation of Labor records of FLU local 18384 (on microfilm at the University of Michigan).
[3] *ibid*
[4] *ibid*

effort while the AFL had not. So the Federation's contribution would give those in the local "a concrete example of American Federation of Labor cooperation" that would go "a long way in satisfying the rank and file" to stave off radical influence.[5] Eventually President Green gave the local the requested funds. That appeal marked the first of several requests to the AFL for help on various internal issues from members both in the executive board and from the rank and file.

Despite the AFL money given to the FLU local, finances remained a constant issue. One point of contention was over whether the money that Green had given to the FLU local was a loan or a contribution. The problem created a "serious controversy" between the union and their former attorney, Schnorf. AFL Secretary Frank Morrison wrote in a letter to the attorney that the money being disbursed to pay him was a loan, though Green had explicitly described it as a "financial contribution." As a result, Siefke requested, on behalf of the FLU local, the AFL to send a representative to investigate the situation in Toledo.[6] By October, more issues over union finance emerged when a member sent an appeal to Green on the constitutionality of an act to temporarily reduce the salaries of the business agent and financial secretary and to remove the expense monies of the recording secretary and the president from the local pay roll. He questioned the procedure in which such measures were passed. Rather then respond directly to this union member, Green forwarded the letter to William Siefke. Siefke explained that the action was taken "due to the very deplorable condition of [their] local treasury."

As the FLU local's financial problems emerged at the executive level, discontent surfaced within the union rank and file membership. The main issue was the amalgamated

[5] *ibid*
[6] Letter from William Siefke to William Green August 30, 1934, American Federation of Labor records of FLU local 18384 (on microfilm at the University of Michigan)

structure (having more than one shop under a union charter) of the local. Following a complaint from a union member in the Spicer Company plant, William Green sent in T.N. Taylor, an organizer who had been present at the final negotiations of the Auto Lite strike, to meet with the rank and file over the question of assigning that factory a separate charter. In August 1934, Taylor met with about 200 members and all five of the shop committees to discuss this issue. In the end, the membership present at the meeting "unanimously decided" against giving the Spicer Company plant a separate charter and directed the members in the factory to focus on a "campaign of organization" to firmly establish the union there.[7] Though several people "found some fault" with the shop committee as well as the union local officers, according to Taylor, "this question was ironed out in a satisfactory way to all."[8]

Despite this apparent settlement at the Spicer Company, tension remained within the local's amalgamate structure. On October 31, 1934, Otto Brach, secretary at the Toledo Central Labor Union, reported to William Green that according to "information at hand from several sources" of union members within the FLU local "there [was] dissatisfaction between certain groups of members" which he felt would become "harmful to the organization itself."[9] These groups "working in different shops" in the union local were "pulling every [in] direction" creating harmful dissention.[10] Brach recommended that each shop within the union should be given their own local charter. He felt that if all the auto parts plants in Toledo were organized under the same union local "such an organization would be unruly."[11] Brach

[7] Letter from T.N. Taylor to William Green, August 3, 1934, American Federation of Labor records of FLU local 18384 (on microfilm at the University of Michigan).
[8] *ibid*
[9] Letter from Otto Brach to William Green, October 31, 1934, American Federation of Labor records of FLU local 18384 (on microfilm at the University of Michigan)
[10] *ibid*
[11] *ibid*

believed that such troubles within the local resulted from its multiple shops for which it "cannot give satisfactory service" to all of them making some members feel neglected.[12]

Much of this was probably a result of the new influence that the Workers Party (what the American Workers Party had become after it merged with the Communist League of America) along side the Unemployment League had gained among some members within the FLU local in the months following the Auto Lite Strike. According to Art Preis, secretary of the Workers Party, "several of the most courageous, intelligent and active members of the" FLU local were "brought into the W.P."[13] These union members (such as James Roland, a "leader of the progressive forces,") sought to organize a caucus within the FLU "to clean out the union" by weakening "the reactionary and backward influences" represented by the union president Floyd Bossler and business agent Tom Ramsey and to "establish the union on a fighting, progressive basis."[14] To do this, they ran a slate of officers for the executive board in their union elections that won seven of the twelve positions. Progressives were also elected to their various shop committees within the FLU local.[15] Thus, the effort of a group of rank and file members to push the union in a militant direction which began during the second Auto Lite strike, continued in the months thereafter.

The factionalism that had grown within FLU local #18384 surfaced on the same day Brach reported the issue to Green in the form of charges brought by the executive board against the business agent Thomas Ramsey and president Floyd Bossler. In his letter to William Green informing him of the charges on October 31, Siefke "knew that things were not so good in [their] union" a week or two before such actions were taken and had written

[12] *ibid*
[13] "Inside Story of Toledo Strike," Art Preis, *New Militant*, May 25th , 1935
[14] *ibid*
[15] *ibid*

beforehand about sending Taylor to assist the union.[16] The charges against Thomas Ramsey revolved around negligence as a business agent over handling complaints and meetings with members as well as his inability to return union papers and property over to the Auto Lite shop committee. On the other hand, the only charge against Floyd Bossler was the one leveled against him by Thomas Ramsey. Ramsey claimed that Bossler tried to get him to "sell out the Union for $30,000.00" for which he said he "had the proof." Two days later, Bossler sent an urgent telegram to Green warning the AFL president of the "bad situation" in the FLU local filled with "jealousy, agitation, frame-ups" which he wanted to be investigated because "labor interests and [his] personal reputation [were] at stake." [17] At that time, he also resigned from the position of union president for which he did "this voluntary act…with no thought of [himself]" but rather for "the cause of labor…in Toledo" and to allow William Green "an opportunity to stop once and for all a lot of damn foolishness and conniving" within the FLU local. When Taylor came to Toledo to look into the matter, he reported, after speaking with members and the executive committee that the FLU local had "been held back for some time due to factional strife" for which "these charges are the outcome of that strife." On November 3rd, the executive board put Ramsey and Bossler on trial and found both guilty on all charges, the latter only because he failed to attend the trial.[18] Ramsey subsequently appealed to the body of union membership, and at a regular meeting on November 23rd the membership failed to uphold the decision in a vote (167 to 91) that fell short of a two thirds

[16] Letter from William Siefke to William Green, October 31, 1934, American Federation of Labor records of FLU local 18384 (on microfilm at the University of Michigan)

[17] Telegram from Floyd Bossler to William Green, November 2, 1934 American Federation of Labor records of FLU local 18384 (on microfilm at the University of Michigan)

[18] Letter from T.N. Taylor to William Green, November 11th, 1934 American Federation of Labor records of FLU local 18384 (on microfilm at the University of Michigan)

majority. At that same meeting, the union membership upheld the executive committee's recommendation to expel Bossler from union membership. The day following the vote, an appeal to overturn the rank and file decision was sent to Green signed by several members of the local "including most of the executives." [19]

Unlike Ramsey who eventually resigned as business agent, Bossler sought to fight the charges. He responded to these actions by the executive committee with an appeal to William Green. He was exercising "the right guaranteed [him] under the constitution of" the AFL "to appeal the acts or findings of the Executive Committee of [his] Local."[20] He claimed that he "was so firmly convinced" that he wouldn't get a fair hearing from the executive board because of "his long association with [its] members" that he didn't show up to the trial.[21] He accompanied this appeal with a letter defending himself to the AFL President and thoroughly questioning Tom Ramsey's character with multiple points about various past incidents which were "well-known" to the executive committee.[22] To substantiate these claims, he listed several union members as witnesses, many of which were the militant organizers from the Auto Lite Company plant including Charlie Rigby, Norman Myer and Lester Byrd. Such an appeal was presented "not as a defense, but with a view of helping my Union and the members whom I served."[23]

Yet Bossler never got that hearing before the AFL Executive Board. At first he "was opposed to jeopardizing the interests of labor" by turning to the court and the local press "to protect [his] name and character."[24] Even with the desire to keep this issue private, he

[19] Letter from William Siefke to William Green, December 5th, 1934; Petition from Siefke to Green, November 24, 1934, American Federation of Labor Records
[20] Letter from Floyd Bossler to William Green, November 23rd, 1934, American Federation of Labor records
[21] *ibid*
[22] *ibid*
[23] *ibid*
[24] *ibid*

questioned if President Green was "cognizant of the seriousness of the entire situation here" in FLU Local #18384.[25] But by December 4th, Bossler became increasingly frustrated with the way the AFL was handling the controversy in the FLU Local. On the national level President Green and his secretary Frank Morrison continued to ignore his request. The members within the FLU local, according to Bossler, had "been kept in the dark" to certain information pertaining to the factionalism brewing within the executive committee, including the terms of his resignation as well as his own defense.[26] With those avenues of appeal seemingly cut off to him, Bossler turned to the local press to advocate his case. He felt that unless the AFL "wish[ed] to assume full responsibility in settling this case" it was his duty "to protect the members of the union and [his] own reputation by using" the information he had "in any way [he saw] fit." [27]

Despite these efforts to get the AFL to focus on resolving the controversy within the FLU Local, Bossler continued to get the cold shoulder. Francis Dillon, the general organizer and national representative of the AFL in the auto industry, had recently taken over the position on October 15, 1934 from William Collins, and served as the mediator in the situation between the FLU local and President Green.[28] He was mainly responsible for ensuring that Bossler's appeal wouldn't be heard at the AFL national level. In bureaucratic fashion, Green deferred much of the decision-making throughout this controversy to Dillon despite efforts on both sides with the FLU local to appeal directly to the AFL President. Following Bossler's effort to publicize the local's controversy in the local Toledo newspapers, Dillon, on December 5th, assured Green that, as Taylor reported to him, the

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[25] *ibid*
[26] Letter From Floyd Bossler to William Green and Frank Morrison, December 4th, 1934, American Federation of Labor record.
[27] *ibid*
[28] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 147.

decision at the November 23rd meeting to expel Bossler from union membership within the local "was handled in a proper manner."[29] Dillon further suggested that neither he nor Secretary Morrison should send a reply to any communications sent by Bossler or Ramsey until "further advised."[30] Furthermore, according to Dillon, though "the Toledo situation" was in a "pretty bad shape," with the help of Taylor they were "endeavoring to straighten it out."[31] Later efforts of Bossler to communicate with Green and Morrison would fall on deaf ears. On January 3th, 1935, Bossler sent another urgent telegram to Green's office "protesting [the] election of [the] president" in the FLU local taking place the next day as "illegal" and requested the AFL president to "stop [the] election by telegraph."[32] Green ended up forwarding that message to Dillon "for [his] consideration" where it went unheeded.[33] The January 4, 1935 election made Ellsworth Kramer, from Bingham Stamping & Tool Company, the new president of the union and Fred Schwake of the City Auto Stamping Company the new business agent. The latter apparently ran with progressive support though he was, at the time, "inexperienced and vacillating" as he came to office "with the promise that he would accept the advice of experienced union men like Roland."[34]

The UAW FLU Local #18384 which in its beginnings had made little effort to establish regular contact, interaction with and support from the AFL was now actively soliciting assistance from the national union leadership. The financial problems and the factionalism that developed following the victorious Auto Lite strike, which may have been interrelated, saw the FLU local, especially the executive committee, turn to the AFL as both

[29] Letter from Francis Dillon to William Green, December 5th, 1934, American Federation of Labor records
[30] *ibid*
[31] *ibid*
[32] Telegram from Floyd Bossler to William Green or Frank Morrison, January 3rd, 1935, American Federation of Labor records
[33] Letter from William Green to Francis Dillon, January 4th, 1935, American Federation of Labor records
[34] "Auto Progressives Organize," Art Preis, *New Militant*, May 18th, 1935

an arbiter and a source of funds. More over, the growing influence of progressive caucus most likely played a role in the growing internal divisions as it attempted to gain positions within the local. The allegations brought against Ramsey both by the executive committee and Floyd Bossler indicated an array of incidents of misconduct as well as alleged subversive activities akin to a company union spy. Though the full details surrounding these controversies within the FLU local #18384 during this period are not clear, the protracted role played by the AFL and its representatives in especially helping to solve these problems within the executive committee demonstrated its growing influence over the officers of the local. This was in spite of the efforts of progressives to push the local in a direction opposite to that of the federation.

Reinvigorated Toledo organized labor, Workers Party/LCUL and FLU local organizing drive

While the internal problems of the FLU local progressed following the Auto Lite strike, renewed organizing and strike activity marked the rest of organized labor in Toledo. The settlement that came out of the Auto Lite Strike, in Roland's words, "boost[ed] the labor movement in Toledo" including both "the new organizations that were coming up" and "those that had been in existence for a long time" especially building trades.[35] In the twelve months between the Auto Lite strike and the Toledo Chevrolet strike, twenty successful or partially successful strikes would be waged in the city.[36] Since its important role in breaking the injunction during the Auto Lite strike, the LCUL had continued its efforts to support the activities of Toledo organized labor. Immediately following the Auto Lite strike, the LCUL was invited to support the Armour and Swift and Larrowe Milling strikes. Moreover, the

[35] Oral history interview of James Roland, Sept. 25, 1960, Jack Skeels, p. 7
[36] "Inside Story of Toledo Strike (Part I)," *New Militant*, May 25th, 1935.

LCUL established formal ties with the Toledo Central Labor Union. In an open letter in the Toledo CLU's official newspaper the *Toledo Union Leader*, Pollock, Preis and Selander asked for cooperation from the union locals in recruiting the jobless into the LCUL to gain better relief in return for their pledged support and help in boycotts and strikes. This marked the beginning of a partnership between the two organizations.[37] Subsequently, Pollock became chairman of the Toledo CLU Strike committee and by February 1935 he had formed a Joint Action Committee with the entire Building Trades Council and the Workers Alliance. This committee ran a general strike among the skilled workers on the Federal Emergency Relief projects in Toledo with "mass strike tactics" which had been "completely outside of the experience of the skilled craft unions" before then.[38] As this strike progressed into March, four other strikes occurred, including the general Milk Drivers strike. This resulted in the formation of an unofficial Joint Board of Strategy composed of all the strike leaders including Sam Pollock. A joint picket line of all the groups of strikers called the "March of Labor" was formed and through "a series of quick concentration on various struck plants and projects" closed them all down.[39] Thus, following the Auto Lite strike, the Lucas County Unemployment League continued to cooperate with and acceptance by organized labor in Toledo, especially AFL craft unions notorious for labor conservatism. This demonstrated their continued strength and effectiveness as a community organization to bring the unemployed and the employed together in collective struggle.

In this atmosphere of revitalized union activity, despite its internal problems, FLU local #18384 began an organizing drive at the beginning of the production season of 1935 to branch out to more auto plant factories in Toledo. According to Preis, the progressives within

[37] "Sam Pollock and the Unemployed League," 114.
[38] "Inside Story of Toledo Strike (PartII)," Art Preis, *New Militant*, June 1, 1935.
[39] *ibid*

the local pushed forward this "program of intensive organization."[40] By March 23, 1935, the FLU local had three new signed contracts with plants in the area: the Dura Company, the Toledo Steel Company and the Myers Regulator Company. The third of these new shops, though a small one with only 300 workers had two separate walk outs (January 25-26 and February 20- March 4) to earn their union contract.[41] With the addition of those shops to the union, the local now had contracts with eight different auto part plants in the city. When the Auto Labor Board (a federal government body established on March 25th, 1934 to handle automobile labor disputes and agents of collective bargaining elections) unexpectedly announced in late March it would be having an election on April 9th in the Toledo Chevrolet plant to determine collective bargaining agency, the focus of the FLU's organizing drive turned to this factory. [42]

Up until then, organizing at the Toledo Chevrolet transmissions plant and its 2300 employees had been difficult even though the shop conditions were quite harsh. The onset of the Great Depression saw productions standards raised and wages cut in the factory. The former change was the most unbearable part of the working conditions in the plant. With the push to increase production by management, as Joseph Ditzel, one of the members of the Chevrolet strike committee, describes it "there was no consideration for the individual at all." [43] In 1933, sparked by the emergence of NIRA, James Roland formed a shop committee to organize the factory. Roland had been a founding member of the FLU local #18384 and an elected trustee to the executive committee. But despite the oppressive shop regime within the plant, he remained "the only member [of the shop committee] for a while" unable to attract

[40] Art Preis, "Inside Story of Toledo Strike (Part I)," *New Militant*, May 25, 1935.
[41] "Proceedings of the First Constitutional Convention of the UAW," p. 26, Henry Kraus Collection
[42] *Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 388
[43] Joseph Ditzel, interview by Jack Skeels, September 25, 1960, p. 2 of transcript, UAW Oral History Collection, Walter Reuther Archives, Wayne State University

other workers.[44] As at Auto Lite, much of this resulted from plant management intimidation towards union membership. It was well understood among workers that joining a union in the factory would result in termination.[45]

Eventually Roland suffered this fate when he was fired for union activity before the Auto Lite Strike in March 1934. During this period he joined the Unemployed League and "became one of its leading members" as an organizer as well as an experienced striker. [46] In the six months between his dismissal and his eventual reinstatement Roland became quite involved in the activities of the LCUL. Initially, as a jobless individual receiving relief assistance, he had become involved with the organization in its efforts to picket the city's welfare headquarters for improved relief. They wanted cash instead of the inedible groceries that the welfare office gave to those unemployed at the time.[47]Then following his experiences in the second Auto Lite strike, Roland became involved in various union and jobless relief struggles around Toledo that, in his words, "demanded some leadership" in which he and others in the LCUL would "go in and help."[48] By the time he was reinstated at the Chevy plant, through his involvement in the LCUL he'd gained "a little bit of information [and]…knowledge" about organizing and became a better speaker. These accumulated experiences along with his courage made him the "spearhead" of the subsequent organizing drive within the Chevrolet plant.[49] Moreover, his connections with those in the LCUL and the Workers Party, (especially Preis, Pollack and Selander), continued through the organizing effort and strike at the Toledo Chevrolet factory. Roland later recalled that he "learned a lot

[44] Roland, interview by Mosier, August 12, 1981, p. 36, blade rare book room
[45] Ditzel, interview by Skeels, September 25, 1960, p. 3, UAW Oral History Collection
[46] Art Preis, "Inside Story of Toledo Strike (Part II)," May 1, 1935, *New Militant*.
[47] Roland, interview by Mosier, August 12, 1981, p. 89, blade rare book room.
[48] *Ibid*, p. 20
[49] *Ibid*, p. 36; Ditzel, interview by Mosier, March 5, 1981 & April 16, 1981, p. 29, blade rare book room.

from" Selander and Pollack whom he "owe[d] a lot to them for [his] knowledge as to what is right and wrong."[50] Despite the influence those individuals had on him, he never really considered himself a left-winger, just a progressive union member. Roland felt that those from the LCUL and the Workers Party "were contributing…[,] helpful and…gave a lot of good pointers" to push forward the union's cause.[51]

During his period of unemployment, Roland sought a hearing from the Automobile Labor Board (ALB) to appeal his dismissal. After he was fired in March, 1934 he had filed a grievance with the ALB. After three months of waiting, in June, following the second Auto Lite strike, he decided to stage a one man picket in front of the Chevrolet plant demanding a hearing before the ALB in Detroit. In terms of the FLU local, it was an "unauthorized" action in which the officers on the executive committee did nothing to help because, as Roland described it, he was politically "off limits."[52] But the Auto Lite union shop, "still [a] militant and progressive group" at the time coming out of their victory, voted at their meeting to support his one man picket. This endorsement got into the newspapers during his individual strike and, on the heels of the recent working class upheaval, put pressure on the company to deal with the situation.[53] Subsequently, the Automobile Labor Board (ALB) in Detroit heard his case. But when a month passed without notification of the results of his hearing, he told the ALB that he would picket again if it did not respond. Roland picketed one more day and finally received a notification of reinstatement as an office worker at the Chevy factory. GM Vice President Knudsen later told Roland at formal negotiations during the Toledo Chevrolet strike that he'd been the one to order him back to work as a way of buying off the

[50] Oral History Interview with James Roland, August 12, 1981, Tana Mosier,p. 6
[51] Oral History Interview with James Roland, August 12, 1981, Tana Mosier, p. 58
[52] *ibid*, p. 3, 24,
[53] *ibid*, p. 22, Oral History Interview with James Roland, Sept., 25, 1960, Jack Skeels, p. 12

organization.[54] Considering the great amount of deference and sway the ALB gave to auto manufacturers, Knudsen could have easily done this.[55] But instead, Roland's return to the plant proved to be the first successful challenge of management's control over the factory. His ability to become re-employed in the plant after being fired for union activity became "the spark" and inspiration for others in the plant to get involved in the organization. Among those who were the first to sign up were Joseph Ditzel and Bob Travis who became part of the organizing drive within the plant and members of the shop committee.[56] The fear towards unionism among the employees there had diminished. Roland, in his renewed organizing effort, would tell workers in the factory that "you don't have to be afraid to join the union" using his example to tell them that management "aint going to fire no more" for organizing.[57]

From that time onward, Travis, Roland put into motion an organizing drive in the Chevrolet plant. Though the Automobile Labor Board's initiation of a primary election for collective bargaining representation within the Chevy factory was important in bringing the workers into the union, the struggle that took place on the shop floor at that time was just as significant. During the organizational campaign, Bob Travis confronted his supervisors on the shop floor over the limited number of bullard gear operators that they hired which overburdened those who worked the machine. His supervisors tried to intimidate Travis into going back to work through the threat of termination. In an act of defiance, he and the other 8 operators came together and he said to the supervisors "if you fire us you fire everybody else in this place." Through an informal action on the shop floor, he and the other operators

[54] , Oral History interview with James Roland, Tana Mosier, August 12, 1981, p. 4, blade rare book room.
[55] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 232
[56] Roland, interview by Mosier August 12, 1981, p. 23& 38, blade rare book room; [56] Bob Travis, part I of interview by Frank Emspak July 9, 1973, p. 2
[57] *ibid*

forced management to hire more operators. Such an action "just by talking up to the superintendent" and getting results "was like a spark in a forest of trees" for the organizing drive bringing in over a thousand workers into the union by the April 9th election. [58] Leading up to that election were two "jammed and enthusiastic" mass meeting where over 900 workers attended.[59] Art Preis, remarked that such rapid organizing in this factory as "one of the most successful attempts…to unionize a plant of the giant General Motors Corp."[60]

Despite the AFL's advice to the Federal Labor Unions to boycott elections under the auspice of the Automobile Labor Board, FLU local #18384 and the Chevy plant shop committee both ignored the federation's recommendation. They felt that the elections would be useful for furthering the union cause within the factory.[61] As a result, the FLU local's new business agent, Fred Schwake was placed on the ballot as its candidate and he received 62 percent of the 2140 employees that voted. [62]

With this initial victory in hand, the Chevy shop committee didn't wait for the final ALB runoff election scheduled for April 24th. Part of their strategy was "to [always] keep one step ahead of the company." They promptly established a contract committee of about 40 workers representing every section of the factory. From this came an agreement proposal, modeled on the ones the FLU local had already signed with the other auto plant parts in Toledo, with five major demands: a signed contract, full seniority, a 10 percent wage increase, 70 cent minimum, and the thirty-six- hour week which was sent to the plant

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[58] Bob Travis, part I of interview by Frank Emspak July 9, 1973, p. 4 & 5 of transcript, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh ; *Collective Bargaining in the Automobile Industry*, W.E Chalmers, chp. XII, p. 3, 1935 (on microfilm at the University of Michigan)
[59] Art Preis, "Toledo Auto Strike Looms," April 13th, 1935, *New Militant*
[60] *ibid*
[61] *Collective Bargaining in the Automobile Industry*, W.E Chalmers, chp. XII, p. 3, 1935

[62] *The Automobile under the Blue Eagle*, p. 388.

management on April 16.[63] The shop committee then met with management on April 18th to discuss the agreement but this proved unsuccessful and on April 20th, at a union meeting, it was given the power to call a strike by the members. With this delegated capability, the shop committee made plans for a strike set for April 22nd at 7 am. By that time, fundamental disagreements had arisen between labor and management during the negotiations. In addition, Chevrolet's efforts to seemingly thwart the union by delaying the final ALB elections, holding small conferences with employees about the ALB elections and appearing to prepare for a "showdown strike" by hiring extra guards and installing wire netting on the windows of the Chevy plant had pushed the shop committee to the point of declaring a strike. The company most likely learned about this decision from the GM-hired Pinkerton Agent on the shop committee, Ben Bonner, because on April 22 they resumed negotiations with a twelve hour long session in which management gave their counteroffer. GM's proposal disregarded all the union's key demands and refused to give it exclusive collective bargaining rights and a signed contract. Despite this apparent effort to delay the walkout, the shop committee put their plan into action the next day.[64] The next day, in response to the walkout they most likely knew was coming, management at the Chevy plant distributed their counterproposal to incoming workers. This "created a lot of confusion" among the workers as they stood around reading the counterproposal and made it initially more difficult to get the workers out of the factory.[65] Despite such efforts, the shop committee, with each member (except Roland who was in charge of establishing the picket line) assigned to an area or department of the plant, eventually brought out much of the workers with little additional

[63] Henry Krause, *Heroes of Unwritten Story*(Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1993), 100. *The Automobile under the Blue Eagle*, p. 388.
[64] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 389; Ditzel, interview by Mosier, March 5, 1981 & April 16, 1981, p. 29; Chevy Shop committee Meeting notes, April 20th, 1935, UAW Local 14 Collection, Box 26, Folder 15
[65] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, p. 100; Roland, interview by Mosier, March 5, 1981 & April 16, 1981, p. 40

trouble. [66] A majority of the workers of that shift left voluntarily and management sent the rest home while the second shift of 1200 workers didn't even report for work. [67]

Toledo Chevrolet Strike of 1935: *Internal Divisions*

The Toledo Chevrolet transmission plant was owned by the Chevrolet Motor Ohio Company a division of the General Motors Corporation (GMC). GMC, at the time, was the "Leviathan of the auto industry" with the most extensive array of domestic and foreign subsidiaries, divisions and affiliates which, in 1934, accounted for 43.5 percent of all cars sold.[68] Taking on such a mammoth corporation in Toledo was new terrain for the FLU which up until then had organized local, independent automobile parts and manufacturing plants. As a result, a strike against GMC required a different approach to force important concessions from it, including a signed union contract especially in face of its virulently anti-union policy. The Toledo Chevrolet transmission plant was a crucial part of the GMC national production chain because it was the only one then making Chevrolet and Pontiac transmissions. Thus, any shutdown of that factory, as Historian Sidney Fine notes, "was bound to have repercussions for G.M. as a whole"[69] Even so, as later events would show during and after the strike, the extensive resources of the national GMC gave it the ability to shift production in face of localized labor troubles. Thus the strike had national implications for both G.M. as well as a potential "genuine show-down on the issue of unionism in the automobile industry."[70]

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[66] Toledo Chevy shop committee meeting minutes, April 20th, 1935, UAW Local 14 collection, Box 26, Folder 15
[67] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle,* pp. 389, 390.

[68] *Auto Industry and Organized Labor*, p. 7
[69] *Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 388
[70] *Auto Industry and Organized Labor*, p. 40.

The Chevy shop committee which became the strike committee once the walk out began had nine members on it but its leadership stemmed from three individuals: James Roland (chairman), Joseph Ditzel and Bob Travis. Roland, only 23 years old at the time, had by far the most experience with unionism among them and because of his courageous act of defiance through his successful one man picket "people [in the plant] just rallied around him."[71] He was also the most radical, militant and influential member of the strike committee. Travis later recalled that Roland was "the guy who started [him] in left wing politics."[72] But, in terms of political ideology, besides Roland and Ditzel, a "Norman Thomas socialist," the rest of the committee "represented just the ordinary American with the ordinary [political] outlook."[73] Members of the strike committee were all, in Ditzel's words, "strong believers in getting…the contract that [they] felt would really do something for the people in the plant."[74] In order to achieve this, the strike committee along with other union progressives within the FLU local sought to expand the strike effort to other GMC plants. Furthermore they wanted to maintain the strike "on a militant, mass action basis" with the leadership and decision making in the hands of the strike committee.[75]

With the walkout initiated on April 23, the strike committee moved to implement their plan. That day, Roland, John Paterwich (another member of the strike committee) and Schwake quickly formed a strong mass picket line at the entrances of the factory with the help of progressives from other plants within the FLU local. Among those progressives was Bill Prior, a member at the Bingham plant shop committee, a veteran of the Auto Lite strikes

[71] Ditzel, interview by Mosier, March 5, 1981 and April 16,1981, p. 63
[72] Bob Travis, part I of interview by Frank Emspak, July 9, 1973, p. 2
[73] Ditzel, interview by Mosier, March 5, 1981 and April 16,1981, p. 50
[74] *ibid*, p. 51
[75] *Auto Industry and Organized Labor*, p. 43

and a Workers Party member who became a picket captain.[76] Prior "came in handy to the strike committee" on the first day's picketing when "in only a short time" mobilized the picket line in front of the employees entrance.[77] There were other progressives whom Roland trusted and "volunteered to help on [their] picket line."[78] Later into the strike, FLU local members from the Auto Lite and Bingham plants made a "guest performance" when Chevy picketers took a break for a membership meeting. These "old veterans" whose "great fighting in the past has won a string of union contracts" wanted "to show [the striking Chevy] union youngsters how it was done."[79] Thus from the first day onward the Chevy strike committee established a discipline picket based on universal participation where each striker registered for six hour shifts. The pickets were organized in "semi-military style" divided into four six-hour shifts with designated "captains" who wore white armbands in charge of each of these groups. Both I.A.M (International Association of Machinists) and MESA (Mechanics Education Society of America) members within the factory also came out in a sympathy strike and refused to return until the matter was settled. [80] In sharp contrast to the Auto Lite strike a year ago, the Chevrolet Company made little attempt to break the picket line. Combined with its discipline and strength, the strikers had a great deal of control over who could enter and exit the plant. That control was initially put on display on the first day when the picket halted a railroad shipment of completed transmissions as well as the removal of 31 cars of raw material from the Chevrolet plant.[81] Subsequent Chevrolet officials and clerical staff would have to ask permission from the strike committee to enter the plant during the

[76] "Toledo Worker Party Minutes," 1935 Sam Pollock Collection, box 12 folder 13
[77] *Strike Truth*, April 26, 1935, Henry Kraus collection, box 4
[78] Roland, interview by Mosier, March 5, 1981 & Apri; 16, 1981, p. 18.
[79] *Strike Truth*, May 7th, 1935, Henry Kraus Collection, Box 4
[80] "Chevrolet Motor Company Strike at Toledo Ohio," Joe Brown Collection, Box 21, Folder 1
[81] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, p. 101, "Chevrolet Motor Company Strike in Toledo," Joe Brown Collection, Box 21, Folder 1

strike. Their control over this key plant throughout the entire strike made 32,000 workers idle in other GM plants across the country.[82]

As the picket line became established, the strike committee began expanding the strike initiative to other GMC plants. They initially sent out telegrams on the first day of the strike to Francis Dillon (who they didn't inform of the walk out decision beforehand) as well as all the other union locals in General Motors informing them about the strike and calling on them to take similar action.[83] The strike committee also established committees to visit other General Motors plants in Cleveland, Flint, Detroit, Bay City, Saginaw, and Norwood to get the union locals there to vote on a walkout and get a national agreement with GMC.[84] The first visit was to Detroit on April 26th where the General Motors Building as well as the big Chevrolet plant was picketed with banners and copies of "Strike Truth" bulletin circulars were distributed. However, the picketers were subsequently escorted out of the city by the Detroit police and their material was confiscated.[85] Through distribution of the bulletin to other GM union locals as well as Toledo striker emissaries, the strike committee sought to nationalize strike sentiment. On April 29th, a resolution was passed by the Toledo strikers at a meeting to further institutionalize the movement towards a national walkout. The resolution encouraged all 23 GM union locals to go on strike and to set up a national joint-action committee composed of representatives from each local as a means of negotiating with GM for a shared settlement. This meant to facilitate an agreement with GMC on a national basis in which "no local to return to work until every local agrees to return."[86] By April 30th, the efforts of the delegations to various GM locals seemed to be paying off as Thomas Williams,

[82] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 392
[83] "Inside Story of Toledo Strike (PartII)," Art Preis, *New Militant*, June 1, 1935
[84] Roland, interview with Skeels, September 35, 1960, p. 14, UAW Oral History Collection
[85] "Chevrolet Motor Company Strike at Toledo Ohio," Joe Brown Collection, Box 21, folder 1
[86] "Revolt of Auto Workers" *New Militant*, May 4th, 1935

a federal conciliator sent to mediate the strike in Toledo, remarked that the situation had "all the appearance of developing into a general strike."[87] At that time, the Norwood Chevrolet and Fisher Body with its 1700 employees joined in a sympathy strike with similar written demands to that of the Toledo Chevrolet workers and both Cleveland and Atlanta GMC plants were closed before strike action could be taken by the union local there. Moreover, MESA voted to refuse to handle material from Toledo until their strike was settled.[88] These efforts by the Chevrolet strike committee and the rank and file strikers to nationalize the walk out attempted to create a sense of unity and solidarity between GMC union locals which by their structure as separate AFL federal labor unions lacked the ability to formulate collective action and bargaining power.

As the Chevrolet strike committee handled the direction and formation of the walkout both on a national and local basis, it also combated General Motor's propaganda in the local newspapers. On the first day of the strike, April 23rd, GM already had placed a full page ad in the *Toledo News Bee* as well as other Toledo newspapers that explained its position and the "outstanding gains" that it had offered the union before the walk out emerged while trying to demonize the strikers for their actions claiming it to be "unwarranted" and as "not contributing to [national] recovery."[89] GM demanded that its proposal be immediately submitted to the Chevrolet workers to be voted on. On the day afterwards, the strike committee issued its own statement that addressed each point that GM made in its ad. Specifically the strike committee analyzed and rebutted each of the various parts of the company's proposal.[90]

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[87] quoted from *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 392.
[88] "Revolt of Auto Workers" *New Militant*, May 4th, 1935
[89] "Chevrolet Motor Company Strike at Toledo Ohio," John Brown Collection, box 21, folder 1
[90] *ibid*

On the same day, April 24th, the Chevrolet strikers voted to establish a strike bulletin called "Strike Truth"; the first edition was published two days later. Joseph Ditzel and Bob Travis were co-editors-in-chief of the first "Strike Truth" and Art Preis, secretary of Toledo branch of the Workers Party, was the associate editor.[91] The publication was initially intended to be a daily medium for the strike committee "to blast the lies" of GM as well as a "mighty weapon to expose and explain the many bewildering insidious and treacherous attempts of the bosses to [regularly] exploit the workers."[92] It marked "a forward step for the entire labor movement in Toledo" as such an initiative had never before been attempted in that city, thus ending "the old game of demoralizing a strike by propaganda of a kept press."[93] On April 26th, publication of the next *Strike Truth* was halted because of complaints on the strike committee that it was too "communistic" with a motion put forth by Ben Bonner.[94] But it was re-started on April 30th by vote of Toledo Chevy strikers during a membership meeting.

Despite the progress made by the Chevrolet strike committee in conducting the walk out, both the national AFL, through its representative, Francis Dillon, as well as individuals within the FLU local executive committee became road blocks in its efforts. Initially, a day after the beginning of the strike, both Green and Dillon gave the AFL's official support of the actions of the Toledo Chevrolet workers, even though the FLU local didn't get their approval beforehand.[95] Both of them, at that time, announced that they expected that such sentiments would spread to other GM plants though didn't actually encourage those FLU locals to take

[91] Though James Roland is listed in both editions of the "Strike Truth" bulletin as one of the co-editors, according to the Chevy Shop committee meeting minute, April 24, 1935 (UAW Local 14 Collection, Box 26, file 15) during the strike, Ditzel and Travis were appointed to those positions
[92] *Strike Truth*, April 26, 1935, Henry Kraus collection, Box 4
[93] *ibid*

[94] "the fourth meeting" April 26, 1935 meeting minutes, UAW Local 14 collection, Box 26, folder 15
[95] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 387, 388

such actions.[96] On that same day, Dillon began his efforts to gain control and influence over the Toledo Chevrolet strike. As Dillon later described it he "went into the City of Toledo and with the assistance and cooperation of the Local Executive Board assumed charge of the situation and directed the officers and members of the Union as to the proper procedure in the handling of the strike in conformity with the policies of the American Federation of Labor."[97] On April 24th, he announced that the Chevrolet strikers would vote on the company's proposal as the strike committee had mistakenly refused to do earlier at the mass meeting on April 26th as GM had demanded.[98]At that meeting, on the invitation of Fred Schwake, Dillon gave a speech to over 1600 Chevrolet strikers in attendance. His speech expressed his paternalist attitude towards the Toledo strikers proclaiming he was speaking to them "not for the purpose of gaining [their] applause nor of gaining any favor" but to "say only those things which will solidify [them] and contribute to the success of [their] endeavors." He seemingly tried to the toe the line as a neutral party in the matter of the walkout, as a force of reconciliation between the Toledo strikers and the GM management. Though he denounced GM as "the most power, the most unscrupulous, the most relentless corporation in America" he also complimented the Vice President of GM, W.S. Knudsen, as "one of the most capable and honorable men in industry today." Dillon also announced that T.N. Taylor would be staying in Toledo for the remainder of the strike and he asked the strikers to "be governed by him" and to "heed well his words of advice" for which, based on his "many years of experience" would come "improved conditions" as well as a new relationship between worker and management in the auto industry transforming "the autocratic and impractical

[96] "Strike Truth," April 26, 1935, Henry Kraus Collection, Box 4 WSU
[97] "Proceedings of the First Constitutional Convention of the United Automobile Workers," Henry Kraus Collection
[98] *The Automobile under The Blue Eagle*, p. 394

and irresponsible" one that currently existed. Through Taylor, Dillon wanted to assert his own influence on the strike situation in Toledo. Out of that meeting came a resolution Dillon put through and unanimously adopted to formally rejecting the company's proposal as well as demanding that GM resume direct negotiations with the strike.[99] From then onward, Dillon sought to position himself during the walkout as the "responsible labor leader" both in the press as well as in relation to GM, in contrast to the "irresponsible local boys" on the strike committee.[100]

Furthermore, Dillon managed to use his position as AFL national representative to prevent efforts to spread and coordinate the walk out on a national basis among the GM FLU locals. Cautious and conservative in nature, Dillon believed that the GM locals weren't strong enough to challenge the company.[101] Dillon also held back several other GM locals from going on strike, for they waited on his approval. On April 30th, Roland criticized the national AFL for such a policy and urged other GM locals to walkout since they wouldn't be granted permission otherwise.[102] One of the crucial GM union locals needed for involvement in the strike to force GM to make important concessions was the Buick plant in Flint and its 9000 employees. GM's efforts to shift production formerly done at the Toledo plant to the Flint location created anger among Buick workers. On April 28th the executive board of the AFL FLU local #18512 in the Buick factory, in a letter to GMC management, wrote that the increase in the workload within this factory was "creating among the employees of the Buick plant a deep-seated feeling of resentment and hatred" and it wanted a conference

[99] Dillon Speech, April 26th 1935, American Federation of Labor records; Dillon Report of Chevrolet Strike to UAW FLU locals, May17th, 1935, Henry Kraus Collection, Box 3
[100] Chalmers analysis, May 16th, 1935, *Joe Brown Collection*. Box 21, folder 1
[101] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 392, 392.
[102] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 392"; Chevrolet Motor Company Strike," p. 4, *Joe Brown Collection*, box 21, folder 1

(subsequently granted) to discuss this issue on April 30th.[103] Out of this conference between the Buick president and the FLU local #18512 executive board came an agreement that there should be no work on any transmissions after Friday, May 3, no substantial increase in Pontiac transmissions for the remainder of the week and no work at all on Chevrolet transmissions while the union agreed that there would be no strike until May 6th which the company management implied that would be the date that the Toledo strike would be settled.[104] On the night of April 30th, a large delegation of Toledo strikers, including James Roland, went to Flint to visit the 300 members of the Buick local who were meeting to vote on this agreement. The Buick local membership voted in favor of the agreement which had given the executive board discretion to defer the strike "if it seemed advisable."[105] On May 5th, the night before the strike, Dillon went and spoke at the Buick union local meeting and appealed to the executive board to delay the strike action pending the outcome of the Department of Labor poll of the Toledo Chevrolet workers over the company's original counter-proposal. [106] On May 11th, however, the Buick local executive board voted to strike on May 14th regardless of the developments in Toledo because, in the words of their union president, "it [was] a question of survival of the union" in the plant. Despite that supposed urgency, again the Buick FLU executive board bowed to Dillon's wishes and deferred a strike on May 13th even with the presence of Toledo strikers at that meeting.[107]

Within the union, divisions over the handling of the strike emerged among individuals on the executive board that were exacerbated by the presence and oversight of

[103] Francis Dillon press release, April 30th, 1935, Joe Brown Collection, Box 21, folder 1
[104] "The Toledo Chevrolet Strike of 1935," Sidney Fine, p. 338, Vol. 67, *The Ohio Historical Quarterly*.
[105] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, p. 102, "Chevrolet Motor Company Strike in Toledo Ohio," Joe Brown Collection, Box 21, folder 1
[106] "The Toledo Chevrolet Strike of 1935," Sidney Fine, p. 338
[107] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 393-394

Dillon. Individuals on the executive committee such as the President Ellsworth Kramer, George Addes and Fred Schwake expressed continual distrust of the strike committee and its left wing allies during the strike. Early in the formation of the picket line, Fred Schwake, in his officially proscribed position of overseeing the strike, excluded left-wing groups including the Communist Party, the Workers Party and the Unemployed League announcing that "this strike is our own affair and we'll keep it clean or know the reason why."[108] Schwake's desire to keep the strike "clean" may have been a result of his own bias against the influence of left wing forces within the local, especially the Workers Party and Unemployed League that could undermine his authority as it did with Ramsey during the Auto Lite strikes.

In terms of spreading the walkout, at first the union executive committee was just as anxious as the Toledo Chevrolet strikers to get other GM locals involved. Both Fred Schwake and George Addes traveled to and spoke along side the Chevrolet strikers at the meeting with the Norwood GM locals encouraging them to join the walk out.[109] But as the walk out progressed and the strike committee sought to formalize a common strike policy among all the GM locals, the executive board attempted to curtail their power. Much of this was in step with the desires of Dillon who sought to localize the Toledo Chevrolet strike as well. When the Chevrolet strike committee, on May 10th, called for a May 12th conference of GM locals to discuss the creation of a joint strike committee, under the influence of Dillon, the executive board repudiated the invitation with follow-up wires to the GM locals that canceled the meeting and stated that Roland had sent the invitations "without

[108] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 390.
[109] *Birth of a Union Local: The History of UAW Local 674, Norwood, Ohio, 1933 to 1940*, John Kruchko

authorization."[110] It also withheld funds from the strike and tried to prevent the publishing of a second "Strike Truth" publication. At a meeting of 150 strike leaders and picket captains with George Addes, financial secretary of FLU local , when one of them asked about the publication of the next issue of *Strike Truth*, Addes, in paternalist fashion, responded "you've got to trust your local executive committee fellows, you gave us the power to put it out at our discretion" causing a round of boos from the audience.[111] Individuals on the executive committee may have not liked the first edition of the *Strike Truth* because of its obvious left wing presence with Art Preis listed as associate editor. The second edition would replace Preis with Walter Gunthrup, editor of the *Toledo Union Leader*, as associate editor.

As Dillon increased his control over the Toledo strike, GM maintained an obstinate stance, but this may have been a stalling tactic while the company initiated efforts to undermine the strike. On April 27th, GM responded to the FLU local's resolution for resuming negotiations, passed the night before, with a refusal to do so formally with the union while they remained on strike.[112] By May 4th, during informal negotiations between the company and the AFL officials, GM and its Vice President Knudsen remained "absolutely unyielding" in their position towards the FLU local. In that time, as the Toledo Chevy strikers maintained full control of the picket line in front of the transmission plant, GMC began to shift production of transmissions to other plants. The company started transferring production of Pontiac transmissions to the Buick plant in Flint, Michigan as well as refurbishing an abandoned factory in Muncie, Indiana at the cost of $800,000 for additional manufacturing of Chevrolet transmission. On May 7th, the latter plant was put into

[110] "Why they Lost in Toledo," Alfred Hirsch, *New Masses VI*, May 28,1935, *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, Sidney Fine, p. 393
[111] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*,
[112] [112] "Chevrolet Motor Company Strike at Toledo Ohio," John Brown Collection Box 21, folder 1

production with 400 workers and by May 12th, had allowed the reopening of the St. Louis assembly.[113] Moreover, a back-to-work movement began on April 29th "started by supervision" from the Chevrolet plant to contest the Chevy strikers' claim that they spoke for the majority of the workers by circulating a petition for either returning to work on the basis of GM's proposal or, if that failed, for a vote of employees through secret ballot on the company's terms. On May 4th this group, now called the Independent Workers Association, had a mass meeting at the Toledo Chamber of Commerce auditorium (home to a business organization who'd already had put out an ad in the *Toledo News-Bee* against the Chevy strike with the title "No one ever won a strike") which was addressed by the Toledo Chevrolet plant's former general manager. With 1600 people, all allegedly Chevrolet employees, in attendance the IWA claimed to have gotten 1400 signatures. [114] Though, according to the strike committee, no FLU local officers or members of the strike committee were allowed into the event and signing the petition was required for admission. Moreover, much of those that did attend were workers that had previously been employed at the Chevrolet plant.[115]

Fearing the impact that the IWA would have on the public opinion, Dillon took further control of the direction of the strike when he sought to affirm the Toledo strikers' position. He proposed and secured a Dept. of Labor conducted poll of the Chevrolet employees over whether or not they supported GM's proposal. After getting the strike committee's reluctant consent on May 5th, Dillon's proposal was put into motion on May 8th when the Chevy workers voted on the ballot. The outcome overwhelming favored the union as 1251-605 in rejection of the company's offer. The results had vindicated Dillon's position

[113] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, Henry Kraus, p. 101
[114] *Toledo News Bee* April 23, 1935, *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 394&395.
[115] *Strike Truth*, May 7, 1935, Henry Kraus collection box 4

when GM, in face of this telling vote, reversed its position and scheduled a conference for formal negotiations with the Chevy strike committee, on May 11th.[116] During this 18 hour marathon session Dillon appeared all too eager to get a settlement regardless of the strike committee's position and "surrender demands that the committee considered fundamental."[117] But in a negotiation recess Roland convinced Dillon to allow the rank and file of the Toledo Chevy union to have the final decision on any agreement that would be reached. The proposed agreement that came out of this conference met few of the Chevy strikers demands including a signed contract. But Dillon now seemed determined to get the union to accept this GM offer after the V.P. William Knudsen told him it would be the company's final offer and threatened to dismantle the Toledo plant if it was rejected. [118] On May 12th, not only did Dillon publicly endorse the potential agreement but he attacked the leaders of the strike who "speak in the interest of workers the language of Soviet dictatorship."[119] Such actions had angered the strike committee and spread the word to vote down the agreement. On May 13th during the mass meeting for voting on GM's proposal a resolution was passed, contrary to AFL regulations, that only members of the strike committee could address the crowd which excluded Dillon. Dillon stormed out of the meeting and declared that the FLU local was no long a part of the AFL. Though the strike committee wasn't concerned by this, the executive committee scrambled to bring Dillon back into the meeting. George Addes left the meeting to retrieve Dillon from his hotel room.[120] Upon his return, greeted by boos, Dillon gave a 30 minute speech and near its end he gave a

[116] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 397
[117] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, Henry Kraus, p. 103
[118] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 398
[119] Dillon's report of Chevrolet strike to UAW FLU locals, May 17, 1935 Henry Kraus Collection, box 3
[120] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 399

thinly veiled threat to the crowd: "if you refuse to accept this offer with in forty-eight hours you will regret it and I am prepared to prove it."[121] But more importantly, when the ballots were distributed, Fred Schwake read the agreement and pointed out the gains made under it which, considering the support he had among the rank and file as their elected business agent, may have turned the tide towards voting for its acceptance. The outcome of the ballot favored accepting the GM's proposal by overwhelming numbers which ended the strike. But this voting result also seemed, in part, to be achieved through elements of coercion that Dillon exerted over the meeting. Yet this agreement signified a partial victory for the Toledo Chevy union for it had successfully conducted a strike against GM and revealed a chink in the auto giant's armor. Later, a resolution was passed in the FLU local petitioning AFL President William Green to "deprive Francis J. Dillon of his credentials as an AFL organizer" and condemned the conduct of Dillon during the strike as "in violation of democratic procedure."[122] But Addes later assured Dillon that there were no more than 60 people were present at the meeting in which this resolution was adopted.[123]

Conclusion

Activity among the progressives within the FLU local animated the period leading up to the Toledo Chevrolet strike. Indicative of this was their efforts to organize more plants and attain positions within the local. But more importantly, this progressive element of the rank and file seemed to be a network of trust and mutual support born out of their shared struggle during the second Auto Lite strike. Though the officers of the FLU local didn't recognize Roland's one-man picket, the Auto Lite shop committee came out in support which, in part, helped him get reinstated. Moreover, once the Toledo Chevrolet got started, the support of

[121] "American Federation of Labor Detroit Office, May 17, 1935" Henry Kraus Collection, box 3
[122] "Resolution," May 24th, 1935, American Federation of Labor records
[123] Letter from Francis Dillon to William Green, June 14, 1935, American Federation of Labor records

progressives from other plants including Bingham and Auto Lite helped to immediately establish a strong picket line.

But the clashes that emerged between the Toledo Chevy strike committee, Dillon as well as the FLU local executive committee, demonstrated the limitations of a local struggle against a national corporation without institutional support. GM's refusal to negotiate with the Toledo strikers while it took action to undermine the union's position illustrated the need to spread the walk out in order to further cripple the company's production. But the strike committee's effort to spread its walk out nationally and formally establish a strike policy with other GM FLU locals on that basis didn't have much of a chance without the support of Dillon. The national AFL leadership's control over the FLU locals gave Dillon's conservative position the upper hand over that of the Toledo strikers. That same control probably influenced local #18384's executive committee to help localize the Chevy walk out. The desire for rank and file control over this issue of nationalizing the walk out which emanated from the Chevy strike committee and subsequently thwarted by Dillon along side their executive committee became the impetus for building a union of all auto workers.

CHAPTER THREE:
Formation of the International UAW, Division, and the GM Sit-Down strikes of 1936-1937

Introduction

The outcome of the Toledo Chevrolet strike demonstrated to the leadership both at the top ranks of the AFL as well as at the grassroots, rank and file level that there was a need for an organization of all the UAW unions. Both Dillon and Green, on June 17th, 1935 realized that the time was right to launch an International and began the process towards that goal by surveying the sentiments of the UAW FLUs on the issue. With an overwhelmingly favorable response, Dillon set a date for August 26, 1935 for a convention in Detroit to establish an International union. On the grassroots level, a progressive movement towards the same goal had been fomenting since June, 1934 under the leadership of Wyndham Mortimer, a member of the Communist Party, and the Cleveland District Auto Council (CDAC), composed of the various auto locals in the city. However, their program for an International union stood in opposition to the cautious policies of the AFL and its leadership. The CDAC held four rank and file conferences in various locations, the last of which was in Toledo (right before the Detroit convention) with representatives from an array of UAW FLUs.

Within FLU local #18384, interest in an International union had grown since the Toledo Chevrolet strike. The local had even sent an open letter to other FLUs to gage their opinion on this issue before Dillon and Green did so through their surveys. By July, 1935 the FLU local had voted in favor of the measure at a membership meeting. The union leadership in the Toledo Chevrolet plant, who had been so adamant in promoting unity among the GM locals during the 1935 walk-out, became involved in the progressive rank and file movement when it hosted the final CDAC conference before the Detroit convention. But the FLU local

executive board controlled the selection of delegates to the Detroit convention via an appointment process instead of through membership election as the convention call had stipulated. As a result, only Travis and Bonner, the latter a conservative member of the shop committee, were selected to go from the Toledo Chevrolet unit.

During the Detroit convention, the FLU local #18384 delegation publicly expressed anti-Dillon and anti-AFL sentiments while utilizing the clout of its large delegation size behind the scenes to gain influence within the nascent International union. Although the officers of the International union were eventually appointed by Green near the end of the convention, members of the Toledo delegation were constantly politicking with other delegations to formulate a voting bloc that included George Addes for International secretary treasurer. Publicly, at moments during the Detroit convention, individual Toledo delegates expressed their resentment towards AFL leadership, especially after Green appointed Dillon as president and the International executive council.

In the aftermath of the Detroit convention of 1935, a controversy emerged between the Dillon and the Toledo Chevrolet local over the issuance over a new UAW International charter. This drawn out episode between the Toledo local and Dillon was driven by the latter's personal vendetta against the former as he over-stepped his own constitutional powers as president in attempting to split the amalgamated local into separate ones. During that time, the Toledo Chevrolet unit requested a separate charter from Dillon and became Local 14. The Toledo Chevrolet shop was undergoing internal issues caused by the decision of General Motors management to relocate several pieces of machinery and equipment from the Toledo plant to non-union factories in Muncie, Indiana and Saginaw, Michigan. This act reduced employment within the Toledo factory by 66 percent and revealed the true shortcoming of

the agreement that had settled the Toledo Chevrolet strike. At the same time, the Chevrolet shop leadership was still having problems with the FLU local executive board over issues of money and other matters of "union politics". Those experiences had made both the Toledo Chevrolet union workers and its leadership even more anxious to work more closely with other GM locals and to organize the rest of the auto giant as Local 14. The Local 14 election brought forth much of the aggressive leadership that had headed the shop and strike committee under the FLU local.

The divisions that emerged between the Toledo Chevrolet unit and the FLU local #18384 executive board during the Chevy strike became exacerbated during the first months of the newly launched UAW International. Between the Detroit convention in 1935 and the South Bend Convention April, 1936 opinions diverged and tensions rose over financial, strategic, and ideological issues. The outcome was the establishment of Local 12 (much of what was FLU local #18384) and Local 14 (the Toledo Chevrolet plant). The latter would play an important support role in the months leading up to and during the G.M. sit-down strikes of 1936-1937 that would ultimately produce a national agreement with the UAW. Underlying all this was the progressive rank and file activity and militancy in the FLU local, in the aftermath of the Chevrolet strike, which took on a national dimension. This became especially true with the efforts of the Chevrolet to create a democratic, membership controlled, militant UAW International focused on a national coordination and organizing plan among GM locals. The GM sit-down strikes in Flint, Michigan would be the climax of this rank and file effort.

Formation of the International UAW

In the months following the partial union victory resulting from the Toledo Chevrolet strike, a movement to create a separate International union of all the UAW FLUs in the AFL gained momentum. Earlier, in February 12, 1935 the AFL Executive Council passed a resolution (put forth by John L. Lewis) to charter the creation of an international union for the UAW. The nature of this union was restricted to a semi-industrial character which, because of the influence of the craft unionists on the Executive Council, limited its jurisdiction to mainly production workers. The resolution recommended that the Federation officers form the union when in their judgment it was "appropriate and convenient" to do so. By June 17th, the outcome of the Toledo Chevrolet strike as well as the subsequent conferences between GM and the UAW FLUs from the various GM plants had persuaded Green and Dillon that the time was right to create an international. They distributed a survey to all the UAW FLUs to get their opinion on this issue and the response was overwhelmingly in favor.[1] Accordingly, Dillon announced that a convention to form an International union would be held in Detroit on August 26th.

Though Green and Dillon were just realizing the importance of an international union for the UAW, a movement for such an organization had been developing on a grassroots level in Cleveland since the summer of 1934. After attending the June 1934 AFL national conference of UAW FLUs, the White Motor FLU local of Cleveland, dissatisfied with the fact that the conference had created an advisory National Council instead of an international auto worker union, initiated a grassroots movement for such an organization. Wyndham Mortimer, a member of the Communist Party, led the White Motor FLU and was one of the driving forces for such a union of all auto locals. Mortimer felt strongly that an international union of all auto workers should be rooted in rank and file control. This idea meant that "the

[1] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 404, 406.

membership [is] in control of their own union" to decide their policy towards employers especially over that of strikes as well as internal union issues such as dues and officer salaries. Strike policy could only be decided by the membership because only "they know the conditions under which [they] work," thus such decisions must be rooted in that collective voice.[2] His vision for an International was a bottom up model which would be shaped by the ideas, initiatives and experiences of the auto workers rather than the top down command and control structure that was then so prevalent among trade unions in the AFL.

With that in mind, in the summer of 1934 he jumpstarted the rank and file movement towards an international auto work union with the formation of the Cleveland District Auto Council (CDAC) representing all the nine auto locals in the area. In August 1934, the CDAC held a conference and issued a manifesto calling for "the adoption of a policy of aggressive struggle against the employers, the establishment of militant leadership in the unions and the unification of the federal local[s] into an International Union within the A.F. of L. based on the principle of industrial unionism and rank and file control."[3] A month later, on September 16, 1934, despite hostility from national AFL officials, the CDAC hosted a Conference for an International Union of All Automobile and Auto Parts Workers in the AFL which was attended by fifty delegates from 36 other FLU locals. Before the August 1935 Detroit convention, there were three more of these rank and file conferences, each with the purpose of promoting the international union as well as the CDAC program for confronting and organizing the auto industry. Important as well in this effort was the CDAC's publication of the *United Auto Worker* newspaper, edited by Henry Kraus, to popularize the movement.

[2] "rank and file control" Henry Kraus collection, box 5, folder 46
[3] *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers Unions*, p. 125.

Mortimer initially only sent copies of the paper to auto unionists whom he had met at the AFL national conference but its circulation soon grew to 65,000. [4]

Coming out of the partial success of the Toledo Chevrolet strike, FLU local #18384 had also grown interested in an international auto union. Despite the tension that had emerged between the Chevrolet strike committee and the executive board over handling the walk out, there was still strong sentiment within the local for formal cooperation between UAW FLUs as a result of that experience. On June 3rd, Siefke wrote an open letter to other locals stating that the recent Toledo Chevrolet strike "has proved again" that they all "must bind themselves together to secure the goals they are seeking." He sought their opinion on this issue of whether "the best results" could be obtained by "remaining directly affiliated with the A.F. of L" as federal labor unions or "through an international [union]" as the Toledo local had been considering the latter. Those within the Toledo local felt that a conference of all the UAW FLUs should be called "in the near future" to discuss the matter and "lay the foundation for an international" if approved by the majority of locals.[5]

Despite shared sentiments FLU local's for an International UAW, progressives in the Toledo union took the initiative to shape its program and structure. During the Toledo Chevrolet strike, the leaders, James Roland, Joe Ditzel, Bob Travis and Kenny Cole, became acquainted with the CDAC movement through Henry Kraus. The commitment of the Toledo Chevrolet shop committee to rank and file control over their strike, and its implementation of aggressive tactics to establish the walk out on a national level among GM locals, fit quite well into the overall mission and manifesto that CDAC had espoused since August of 1934. Thus, a little less than a month after the strike ended the Toledo Chevy leadership along side

[4] *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers Unions*, pp.125-128
[5] Letter from William Siefke to other UAW FLUs, June 3, 1935, box 4, folder 18, Henry Kraus Collection.

other progressives within FLU local #18384 met on June 8th& 9th , before the announcement of the Detroit convention,in Toledo with others from this rank and file movement. The Toledo delegation (26 total), especially the Chevrolet union leadership, was well received as the "stars of the show" in light of their accomplishments during the recent strike. The delegates at the conference expressed their respect for the Toledo Chevrolet union leadership by unanimously choosing Roland to chair the gathering as "homage" to their achievement.[6] At that meeting, the rank and file caucus finalized their platform for an International UAW on the basis of several principles: an industrial union with full jurisdiction over all auto workers in the industry, a democratic union controlled by the membership over its leadership, no discrimination based on color, nationality, or religious/ political beliefs, and a program for "militant struggle" against employers in pursuit of auto worker demands. Moreover, the Toledo delegation, most likely based on their experiences with the Lucas County Unemployed League, put forth a resolution for the progressive caucus to "go on record as actively aiding in the organization of genuine working class organization of the unemployed" which was subsequently adopted. In particular they urged the FLUs to "cooperate actively" with the unemployed and their organization to win union rates of wages and in establishing union conditions on federal relief projects.[7] Near the end of the meeting, preparations were made for the potential convention for establishing an International union. Among the most "immediate tasks" was to present and discuss the proposal for an International UAW within all groups in the locals.[8] Roland later wrote that if such an International had existed at the time of the Toledo Chevrolet strike they "could have secured a signed agreement covering all

[6] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, Henry Kraus, pp. 109-111, "Toledo, Ohio, June 8th, 1935, meeting" notes , Henry Kraus Collection, *Labor's Giant Step*, p. 38
[7] Toledo, Ohio, June 8th, 1935, meeting" minutes, Henry Kraus collection
[8] Toledo, Ohio, June 8th, 1935, meeting" minutes, Henry Kraus collection

the General Motors plants that is of course if we had democracy in our International."[9] Thus for progressives within the Toledo union, especially within the Chevrolet unit, the next logical step in the aftermath of their squelched rank and file initiative to nationalize the recent walkout was to work for a militant International UAW controlled by membership.

Following the announcement of the Detroit convention, favorable sentiment from both from the executive committee and from progressives actively promoting an International UAW, assured an endorsement for the organization from the Toledo local. However, on July 1st Tom Ramsey, still a member of the National Council and a Dillon loyalist, tried to claim otherwise. In an open letter to the FLU UAWs he announced that the Toledo union had gone "on record as opposing an International" in a recent union meeting because the auto industry was "not yet organized to the extent that [they] could support" such an organization. But that announcement was quickly rescinded as Henry Kraus published in the July issue of the *United Auto Worker*, that "by an overwhelming vote" the Toledo local and its 12,000 members were in favor of creating an International auto union.[10]

Despite widespread support for the International UAW within the Toledo union, the means by which convention delegates were selected demonstrated a divisio between some members of the executive board and the progressive elements in the local, especially that of the Chevrolet unit. Although the August 1 convention call notice from Dillon had stipulated that delegates were to be elected by membership, the FLU local #18384's executive committee decided instead to appoint delegates for the Detroit convention.[11] According to Burke Cochran, vice president of the MESA local in Toledo, at the membership meeting in which this occurred, Tom Ramsey put through the motion and the president refused to

[9] *United Auto Worker*, July 1935
[10] *United Auto Worker*, July, 1935
[11] "Proceedings of the first constitutional convention" p. 2, Henry Kraus collection

entertain any further discussion or motions on the issue. Moreover, there were apparently twenty policemen stationed at the entrance of the union hall to "terrorize the membership and to prevent any distribution of the progressive program."[12] This may have been a work of collusion between AFL officials, namely Tom Ramsey, the AFL national office and the executive board to exclude "nominees sponsored by the Communist Party" from becoming delegates to the auto worker convention as had happened in other FLU locals.[13] Much of this was targeted at Roland who had been a leading opposition voice among the progressives within the local both as a trustee as well as the chairman of the Chevrolet shop committee. Krause, who had at the time discussed this situation with Roland, later wrote that "the controlling majority of the [executive] committee had their own factional reasons for wanting to get rid of" him and "simply arrogated the power to do so." The FLU local #18384's executive board which, as Krause put it, "essentially ran the organization" dictated the Toledo delegation to exclude Roland and most of the other progressives within the local.[14] With the exception of Bob Travis, none of those from Toledo who had attended the June 8th meeting and endorsed the platform of the progressive caucus were selected to be a delegate.[15] The other delegate chosen from the Chevrolet unit was Ben Bonner; the most conservative, least trusted member of the shop committee and a GM-hired Pinkerton agent.

At the final rank and file conference which was held in Toledo a day before the Detroit convention, Roland publicly denounced the executive committee actions of his FLU local in selecting delegates. He said that the delegates from the Chevrolet unit would protest the actions of the Toledo executive board to the credentials committee at the Detroit

[12] "Dillon to Pack Convention of Auto Workers," *New Militant*, August 24th, 1935
[13] *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers Unions*, p. 134, *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, p. 108&109
[14] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, p. 109&110
[15] "Proceedings of the first constitutional convention," p. 41, Henry Kraus collection

convention. But after some discussion, the Norwood delegates present at the conference volunteered to take that action. Yet this never happened because later others in that delegation rejected the idea because they didn't want to take an antagonistic stance toward the large Toledo local.[16]

This conference adopted a pamphlet created by the CDAC and subsequently handed out at the Detroit convention. It expressed the sentiments of the progressive caucus and its core principles of militancy and aggressive organizing, industrial-base unionism and democratic-rule rooted in membership control while condemning the red-baiting attributed to such a platform. Moreover, it pointed to the Toledo Chevrolet strike as an example of how current AFL control has inhibited unionism in the auto industry.[17] But despite such preparations, the constraints that the AFL leadership would place on the nascent UAW International and its capability for self-rule prevented the implementation of the progressive agenda into the organization.

During the Detroit convention, despite the undemocratic manner that the Toledo delegation was selected, individual members were quick to challenge the attempts by the AFL to assert control. On the morning of the second day of the convention, August 27th, after the convention committee's report on rules was read, a Toledo delegate, Fred Mayberry, through a "point of privilege" moved "that all general organizers who were paid by the American Federation of Labor be instructed and compelled to remain away from the hotel and convention." Though Dillon, the chair of the convention, immediately called that motion out of order, Henry Kraus observed that that first act of rebellion against AFL leadership during the Detroit convention resonated among many of the delegates and their desire "to run

[16] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, p.112.
[17] "Statement of the Progressive Delegates to the Convention of the United Automobile Workers Union," Henry Kraus collection

their own convention and, by extension, their own International as well."[18] This battle continued over a resolution, sent in advance by the National Council to the UAW FLUs, which called for the appointment of Francis Dillon as the president of the UAW during its provisionary first year. In a close vote, the measure was defeated 164-112. The 38 opposing votes of the Toledo local played an important part in the defeat of this resolution, and bolstered its position as an anti-Dillon group. However, that show of rejecting AFL leadership wouldn't last very long for, on the fourth day of the convention, August 29th, Green unceremoniously appointed both Dillon as president of the International UAW, and the members of the National Council (including Tom Ramsey) as the executive board, for its first probationary year. He justified that action based on a provision of the charter by the AFL Executive Council that gave the president the power to designate International officials during its initial period. Following this appointment of International officers for the UAW's first year, Ellsworth Kramer, president of the FLU local #18384, in an act of defiance, moved to rescind the acceptance of the UAW charter that had taken place on the first day with such provisions attached. His motion was seconded by Bob Travis. Dillon responded predictably ruling that the motion was out of order. But Kramer declared in response "I appeal to the rank and file." Though this protest couldn't be won in those circumstances, it led to the election of a committee of seven at the Detroit convention to appeal such decisions to the Executive Council at the upcoming AFL convention in Atlantic City. George Addes was among those elected to that committee.[19]

But before Green appointed the UAW International executive board, the Toledo local delegates were actively politicking and making backroom deals for the International

[18] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, Henry Kraus, p. 115
[19] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, Henry Kraus, p. 125-127

executive board elections behind the scenes. As the FLU local with the largest paid membership coming into the convention and, in turn, the largest delegation (38), it carried a lot of clout. Moreover seven of the eleven convention committees, appointed by Dillon, contained representation by a Toledo delegate including four officers from the executive board: Kramer, Schwake, Addes and Siefke.[20] The delegation utilized that clout as they pushed the candidacy of George Addes for the position of secretary treasurer. The local rented a big room in the hotel that all the convention delegates were staying and served free drinks to sway "wavering Dillonites." They managed to get an agreement with those from the Studebaker delegation from South Bend, Indiana bringing together the two strongest locals in the union into a voting bloc for each other's preferred candidates with a total of 88 votes. Then Kramer made a deal with the Cleveland and Norwood delegation to put together more votes for their slate, and this brought together about half the votes for the elections into the Toledo camp.[21] Thus the public denouncements by individual Toledo delegates of the AFL leadership and Dillon's control appeared to be more of a calculated power grab than a matter of principle or any affinity towards the progressives. By selecting and appointing delegates for the Detroit convention, the executive committee could ensure that they all voted as a controlled bloc which they could use to shape the International executive board. But such an act also placed the FLU local #18384, especially its executive committee, further from its democratic roots and suggested the growing power this body exerted over the rest of the union. Also their public antagonistic stance towards Dillon during the Detroit would later lead to clashes with him as president of the International UAW.

[20] "Proceedings of the first constitutional convention," p. 52 &53, Henry Kraus Collection
[21] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, Henry Kraus, p. 120

FLU local#1838, the Dillon Charter Controversy, and the emergence of UAW local 12 and 14

Following the Detroit convention, the FLU local #18384 sought to get a new charter within the new international auto union. By then the FLU local, as an amalgamated union, covered thirteen different shops 10 of which had contracts, under its charter. Dillon sought to break up the union by giving each of these shops their own charter. The antagonism between the FLU local and Dillon over this issue became a long protracted affair. Upon application for a International charter, FLU local #18384 received nothing but a letter bearing a special notice stating that it was henceforth the "adopted policy of the International" to issue charters only to single plants.[22] Yet neither the Detroit Convention, the International UAW's Constitution, nor the International's Executive Council had made a ruling on this issue. Furthermore, International UAW charters had been issued by Dillon to other locals including those in Kansas City, St. Louis, Atlanta and Norwood who all had more than one plant under their respective jurisdictions.[23]Thus, it is clear that Dillon was purposefully targeting the Toledo local over this issue for purely personal reasons, for he had no legitimate constitutional power to do so.

Following this notification, the executive board of the Toledo local met with Dillon on several occasions. Dillon promised them that they would receive a probationary single charter for sixty days to give the various units time to set up separate organizations. The rank and file of the FLU local rejected this proposal and demanded a single charter with no strings attached, even voting to withhold its per-capita tax when Dillon tried to apply pressure.[24] The

[22] *Heroes of Unwritten Sotry*, Henry Kraus, p. 156
[23] "Dillon and The Toledo Charter " memo from International UAW General offices, Homer Martin collection, box 2, folder 5
[24] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, Henry Kraus, p. 157.

Toledo FLU told Dillon that his proposal of separation was "very dangerous" to their local.[25] After being notified of this decision, Dillon promised he would appeal to the UAW Executive Council over the issue of a probationary charter. After a series of meetings between the Toledo union and Dillon by December 30th, the executive board finally decided to accept the probationary charter which was valid. When that charter never came, the executive board made a trip to Detroit to get it from Dillon. He responded with the offer of separate charters which the executive board flatly refused. FLU local#18384 wouldn't receive its charter to become UAW local 12 until February 16th, 1936 in a public ceremony following a conference a week before hand with Homer Martin, International UAW vice president, and Ed Hall, secretary-treasurer. The latter was the only person on the Executive Council that had the constitutional power to issue charters.[26]

In the midst of this controversy, in January 1936 the Toledo Chevrolet unit asked Dillon for a charter of its own. He subsequently granted the Toledo Chevrolet unit a charter as UAW Local 14. The Chevrolet Committee explained that its charter request was based essentially on strategic policy differences with the FLU local #18384's executive board as well as the desire "to be closer to other General Motors locals."[27] As the Toledo Chevrolet unit learned during its strike, "local Chevrolet problems become General Motors problems and cannot be settled on a local basis."[28] Under their FLU local structure, they have "been trying to fight a national problem on a local basis" which they "have been unable to iron out with [their] local executives" for the past three months.[29] The Toledo Chevrolet unit made it clear that there was "no antagonism" between the Chevrolet group and the FLU local and

[25] *The Automobile under the Blue Eagle*, p. 422
[26] "Toledo Union Granted Charter: Official Statement of Local No. 12," *United Auto Worker*, March 1936
[27] "Toledo-Chevy Group explains its stand." February, 1936, *United Auto Worker*
[28] *ibid*
[29] *ibid*

that it was its "earnest desire to cooperate to the fullest extent" with the FLU local as well as with "all organized labor."[30] Furthermore, the Toledo Chevrolet unit described its act to separate from the FLU local not as motivated by selfishness but driven "purely and simply" by self-preservation.[31] Ditzel later described the reason for the separation as a matter of "union politics."[32] Roland clashed with the FLU executive board, as clearly demonstrated in the selection of delegates to the Detroit convention, at the time. As a result, the executive committee of the FLU local wouldn't grant them money to meet and conduct organizing activities with other GM locals, thus the Toledo Chevy leadership "felt that they [weren't] giving [them] the help that they should have" in this effort. [33] One worker from the Spicer plant, who may have reflected sentiments of some on the executive board, explained the separation by claiming that "the Communists" or their "fellow travelers who had control of the Chevrolet Plant decided that things weren't as good for them…[since] they couldn't go [to the FLU executive board]" and get "money for any of their front organizations" or their "good fat trips."[34]

The undemocratic manner in which the Toledo local executive board had chosen delegates to the Detroit was one aspect of this "union politics" that contributed to the split. By January 1936, the Chevrolet committee wanted to receive their charter "immediately" so that they could "have representation at the next convention" of their own choosing.[35] The Chevrolet unit and the FLU executive board differed over the support of candidates running for International officer positions in the upcoming elections to be held during the South Bend

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[30] *ibid*
[31] *ibid*
[32] Ditzel, interview with Skeels Sept. 25, 1960, p.7, UAW Oral History Collection.
[33] *ibid*
[34] Frank Golembiewski Oral History- "Story of Local 12," August 6, 1963, Richard Gosser Papers Folder 2, Box 1, Canaday Center Manuscript collection. University of Toledo.
[35] Letter from James Roland to Henry Krause, Jan. 28th, 1936, Henry Krause collection, box 5, folder 33.

Convention. The voting bloc established between much of the Toledo delegation and the South Bend delegation during the Detroit convention continued in intra-union politicking during the first three months of 1936 leading up to the South Bend Convention. Roland wrote, after a discussion with George Addes, that the Toledo delegation was planning on supporting Carl Shipley, from the Bendix local in South Bend, Indiana, for the Vice President position if they supported Addes for financial secretary. Roland discouraged the Cleveland delegates from supporting Addes unless it was "absolutely necessary as a political move" claiming that he was a "reactionary" and unfit for the position.[36] He asserted that the Chevrolet committee supported Wyndham Mortimer for President or Vice President. Since the Detroit convention, the Toledo Chevy leadership had been "popularizing" him among the members based on the organizational strength of the White Motor local that he represented as well as the "splendid fight" he had put up for an International Auto Union with a democratic, industrial structure.[37] Local 14's support for Mortimer demonstrated its progressive outlook and increasing ties between it and the Cleveland locals. Moreover it contrasted with the pragmatic, power broker mentality within the executive board of Local 12 towards the UAW International office.

During the fall of 1935 while the charter controversy between the Toledo local and Dillon dragged on, the Chevrolet workers experienced first hand the shortcomings of an individual strong local union within GM. For five months after work resumed on May 14th in the Chevrolet plant, the union had been successful both in organizing most of the workforce (membership made up about 92% of the employees) and in dealing with management in bargaining over grievances, regulating production standards and additional concessions. But

[36] *ibid*
[37] *ibid*

management, it turned out, according to Ditzel, was just "playing with [them]" like "a cat plays with a mouse" giving them what they wanted to keep them content during that time.[38] Following the Toledo Chevrolet strike, GM VP Knudsen had told a federal conciliator that the episode had caught the company "napping" and the company was determined "never to be in such a position again."[39] As a result, GM began implementing a decentralizing policy with the aim "of diversification of plants where local union strength [was] dangerous."[40] On October 1st, the executive shop committee in the Toledo Chevrolet plant learned that GM planned to move a majority of work out of the city. It subsequently met with the Plant Manager, Alfred G. Gulliver, on October 15th who stated that the plant would close for inventory and rearrangement on October 18th and that a third of the machinery would be moved to Saginaw, Michigan. Later he promised that all those currently employed at the plant would be rehired after the remodeling was complete. During that period, the Chevrolet unit sent delegations to Saginaw, Michigan and Muncie, Indiana to evaluate the potential for organizing the work forces of the GM transmission plants at these locales. At both work sites, the delegations learned the extent of GM's decentralization plan. New plants were being built in both cities to pull work away from the Toledo Chevrolet plant and "covering all their key manufacturing plants of similar equipment, so that in [the] event of labor trouble in one plant it will not tie up their industry."[41] Thus it appeared that GM was trying to phase out the Toledo Chevrolet plant

When the Toledo Chevrolet plant was re-opened in early November, much of the machinery for making transmissions had been transferred to plants in Muncie, Indiana and

[38] Joseph Ditzel Oral History, p. 8, Sept. 25, 1960, p. 8
[39] *The Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, p. 402.
[40] *Sit-Down*, p. 49
[41] " Report from Saginaw and Bay City, Michigan," "Report from Muncie, Indiana," UAW Local #14 collection, Box 3, Folder 38

Saginaw, Michigan. The former had been reactivated during the Toledo Chevrolet strike. Both were non-union plants where wage rates were as low as half of those prevailing in Toledo. As a result, only 1100 workers were rehired in Toledo and when the shop committee reminded Gulliver of his earlier promise of full employment when the factory re-opened, he responded by saying "yes, but I didn't tell you where they would be hired." Since the Toledo Chevrolet workers had not obtained a national agreement during their strike when they were in a good position to do so, GM was able to use its control over the means of production to shift work to non-union sites and thereby undermine the organization at Toledo. Furthermore, GM may have blacklisted unemployed Chevrolet union workers as many of those that tried to find work in other shops in Toledo were subsequently dismissed when it was discovered that they used to work in the Chevrolet plant.[42] In these circumstances, the Toledo Chevrolet shop committee, as Ditzel put it, was "demoralized" and they "didn't know what to do."[43]

Despite the devastating impact of GM's actions on the Toledo Chevrolet union and its leadership, the laid off members of the local didn't take it quietly. The 900 workers who weren't rehired resented the fact that the union had not done more to protect their jobs. In the middle of December they organized into a Committee of 900, elected a seven person membership committee, and released a statement that denounced GM's act as part of a "deliberate and well-planned drive" by automobile and auto parts manufacturers "to destroy [their] union organization in Toledo."[44] The statement urged against desertion of the Chevrolet union or attempts at creating competing or dual unions within the plant for which

[42] " Information on Chevrolet, Local #14, Toledo, Ohio, Discrimination" Homer Martin Collection, Box 2, Folder 5; *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, Henry Kraus, p. 157
[43] Ditzel, interview by Mosier, , March 5, 1981 & April 16, 1981, p. 66
[44] "900 Auto Men Act In Toledo," *New Militant*, December 28, 1935

such actions would be met with "the most determined resistance from [their] ranks."[45] The Committee of 900 was an agitation group within the Chevrolet local to get the union to do more to ensure job protection. Moreover, it encouraged workers still employed in the plant to maintain their union loyalty and stick with the organization. With the pressure coming from this group, the shop committee was split over the course for the union. Three of them, including James Roland, favored union membership strike action while Joe Ditzel and the other five members of the shop committee wanted to continue negotiations for thirty more days.[46] In response, the leadership put forward a "share-the-work-program" that the membership unanimously approved. The program was designed to prevent hunger through a more equitable distribution of the work burden (i.e., less shifts) amongst the union workforce.[47] Their slogan became "Everybody works or nobody works."[48] Thus the public agitation and activity of the laid off rank and file members put into motion an initiative that strengthened and saved their union.

When presented with a charter on February 15th, Local 14 came into its own as a union in Toledo with a separate identity from Local 12. It elected an executive board with Bob Travis as the first president and Joseph Ditzel as recording secretary. Surprisingly, considering his prominent leading role in organizing the Chevrolet plant as well as its strike, Roland wasn't elected to any position.[49] But the rise of Travis to president of Local 14

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[45] *ibid*
[46] *ibid*
[47] " Information on Chevrolet, Local #14, Toledo, Ohio, Discrimination" Homer Martin Collection, Box 2, folder 5
[48] " Information on Chevrolet, Local #14, Toledo, Ohio, Discrimination," Homer Martin Collection, Box 2, Folder 5, *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, Henry Kraus, p. 157

[49] James Roland Oral History, August 12, 1981, pp. 8,9, 71. He wanted to be financial secretary since he had "done all this [union, organizing and strike] work" in the past two years for free, he wanted this salaried position. But Kenny Cole, at the last minute, ran against him during the election and won. Roland felt "double-crossed" by Kenny's actions and hurt by the lack of support from the workers. He never ran for another position

further enmeshed the local in the progressive rank-and-file movement sweeping into the South Bend convention, as he became closer to one of its primary spearheads, Wyndham Mortimer as well as a member of the Communist Party.[50] The cumulative experiences among the Toledo Chevrolet workers from the time beginning with strike of 1935 through the date of the South Bend Convention in 1936 would make the members of Local 14, as Joseph Ditzel put it, "more anxious to get organization started in General Motors than anybody else in the UAW" at the time. For they felt that the remaining jobs in the Toledo plant were at stake.[51] By surviving efforts by GM to undermine the union in the Toledo Chevrolet plant, Local 14, in the words of Henry Krause, "served as one of the big [auto organizational] drive's most dynamic forces" which made "its greatest contribution to the Flint sit-down in January 1937."[52] Under Bob Travis, Local 14 "had tremendous [organizing] activity everyplace" around Toledo as manifested by its organization of the workers at Toledo Concrete Pipe Company, Bunting Brass, Toledo Machine and Tool Company and AP Parts into their union. But the local's progressive outlook and desire to organize the unorganized also extended beyond immediate self-interest. Outside the auto industry, they supported the organizing efforts in Toledo of retail clerks, Bowling Green rubber workers, Harbaur Canning Company workers, dairy workers as well as waitresses. [53]

South Bend Convention, GM, and the 1936-1937 sit-down strikes

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within the local and though he remained quite active especially during the GM sit-downs, the defeat signaled the beginning of the end of Roland's involvement in organized labor

[50] Travis, part I of interview by Emspak, July 9, 1973, p. 11 Travis says that, by the time of the South Bend Convention, he'd joined the Communist Party because of his respect for and friendship with Wyndham Mortimer though it wasn't well known at the time

[51] Ditzel, interview by Skeels, September 25, 1960, p. 12, UAW Oral History Collection.

[52] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, Henry Krause, p. 157

[53] Travis, interview by Emspak July 9th, 1973, part I- pp. 12 &13; Ditzel, interview by Mosier March 5, 1981 & April 16, 1981, p. 78& 80

As the controversy over the Toledo local's charter in the International Union began to settle and both Local 12 and 14 became established, the city served as the first site for progressive organizing leading up to the South Bend convention in April. In early February, an informal caucus of delegates "from the leading progressives unions in the International" adopted a five point platform for further discussion at the next progressive caucus in March in South Bend, Indiana.[54] It basically reaffirmed much of the progressive vision for the International Auto Union that had been building since being jumpstarted almost two years before by the Cleveland locals. The platform included: Industrial unionism (full jurisdiction in the Auto Industry as well as amalgamation with independent auto unions), organize the unorganized (especially in Michigan), complete democracy, militant labor policy and a labor party.[55] A committee of twelve members, including George Addes, was formed to put this platform into resolutions for approval by both the South Bend caucus and the convention in April. Subsequently, the South Bend caucus, attended by 200 delegates from 141 different locals, approved this program and its resolutions for the upcoming convention. To avoid the politicking that was a part of this caucus, no slate of candidates was endorsed for International office but it was agreed to expand the number of Vice President positions from one to three.[56]

Right before the South Bend Convention, Travis took the lead in promoting unity among UAW GM locals as part of the larger organizing effort within the auto giant. He proposed the formation of a council of all the UAW locals within GM. At this point the UAW had a "foothold" within GM, though a weak one, and those locals needed to come together in order to prevent the auto corporation from crushing "each [of them]

[54] "What do progressives stand for," *United Auto Worker*, March, 1936.
[55] *ibid*
[56] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, p. 159

individually." Through the GM council, these locals could "realize [their] own strength" for the purposes of collective bargaining as an industry. [57] However, Bob Travis held back this plan during the South Bend Convention because of the organizational weakness of much of the UAW locals in their particular plants. The overriding goal for many of the GM locals at that moment was to bolster their own numbers and strengthen their presence where they already existed. The GM council, at the time, would have only represented about 2500 of General Motors' 250,000 workers.[58] But Travis' initiative represented a strong attempt to advance and institutionalize in the UAW what Roland and the Toledo strike committee had tried to achieve in 1935: coordination among all GM locals to achieve a national agreement with General Motors.

The South Bend convention saw both the end of direct AFL control over the UAW and the movement of the progressive platform to the forefront. The outcome of the first International elections was a good indicator of progressive strength among the leadership in which of the eleven elected to the International Executive Board, eight either had definite connections to the left wing or leaned in that direction. Mortimer was elected first Vice President and Addes became secretary treasurer.[59] This seemed to symbolize a reconciliation of the intra-union political differences between Local 14 and 12 over International office that had preceded the South Bend convention.

In addition to the election of a predominantly progressive leadership to the International UAW, the ground work for a nation-wide UAW organizational drive in the next year was put into place. The March caucus approved a resolution and in turn passed at the South Bend convention which called for such an initiative as well as raising $250,000

[57] "Lets face the facts," R.C. Travis, *United Auto Worker*, May 1936.
[58] *Heroes of Unwritten Story*, p. 178.
[59] *Sit-Down*, Sidney Fine, pp. 90&91

(consisting of $75,000 from the UAW locals and the rest from the AFL and "other sympathetic organizations") to implement it. One of the explicit targets was GM. Mortimer accurately predicted that a "fight" with GM would come by the next convention while Ed Hall, who was elected as a Vice President, exclaimed that "General Motors will know damn well we are not running away from them." [60]

With an aggressive UAW International leadership in place, the organizational campaign was launched on June 22. Various International officers and members of the Executive Council were assigned to various areas targeted for organization. Mortimer, who correctly saw Flint as "the most important point in the whole organization campaign," oversaw the effort to organize the city which had been such a crucial holdout during the Toledo Chevrolet strike of 1935. By August, Travis' proposal for a GM council was being put into action when following a meeting of the International Executive Board, representatives of the GM locals met to discuss their common problems. On September 14th, they met again and finally approved Travis' plan for establishing a GM Advisory Council. Furthermore, the representatives created a steering committee to plan a GM organizing campaign of which Travis became a member.[61] Despite these promising developments towards establishing a UAW-sponsored program of organization within GM, the real test for the nascent International union laid in Flint, Michigan, the heart of the GM auto empire. By September 27th, as a result of internal struggles taking place within the International executive board, Travis took over for Mortimer as organizational director in Flint.[62]

In his new position as organizational director in Flint, Travis was initially hesitant about his own abilities to accomplish this great task. But with the encouragement of UAW

[60] *ibid*.
[61] *ibid,* pp. 94,95,109.
[62] *Ibid*, p. 111.

officials, he remained in the city. Based on his contacts through the Communist Party in Flint, as well as an analysis of the various plants in the city, Travis decided to concentrate his initial organizing in the Fisher body no. 1 plant. His decision was rooted in his own previous experience in the Toledo Chevrolet strike of targeting a plant that, if shutdown, would have a maximum impact on the GM's national production capabilities. The Fisher body no. 1 plant made Buick bodies and, as Travis put it, "if [they] could stop Buick bodies [from] being made [they] could stop Buick."[63] Travis worked through the UAW Local #156 that Mortimer had created out of the five old Flint FLU locals to get volunteer organizers. But he like Mortimer also distrusted the executive board whom he felt were filled with "stool pigeons."[64] Thus he relied on his communist connections to establish a nucleus of union supporters within the Fisher Body no. 1 and no. 2 plants. He appointed his own union shop stewards for which he tried to keep their union affiliation a secret. In that effort in targeting the Fisher Body No. 1 plant, like Mortimer before him, Travis concentrated on enrolling those workers employed in the "body-in-white" department where the principal soldering and welding, essential functions within the factory, took place. [65]

During his time spent organizing in Flint, Travis also remained in regular contact with others from Local 14. On October 21, he reported to his local that Fisher Body No.1 was "just about boiling over" as organizing had proceeded well within the plant. Travis advised Cole, the financial secretary of Local 14, to be prepared "to come out on the street" at any time and to "organize every man possible that is willing to come to Flint on an hour's notice." [66] He expected the strong support of his local in the upcoming showdown with GM

[63] *Ibid,* p. 113, Travis, interview by Emspak, July 9, 1973, part I, p. 16, part II, p. 1 &2
[64] *Sit-Down*, Sidney Fine, p. 109 & 113.
[65] *Ibid*, p. 113
[66] Letter from Robert Travis to Kenneth Cole, Henry Kraus collection, Box 8, Folder 38

in Flint. In late December, following Christmas, Roland came to Flint on Travis' request, despite initial resistance from Homer Martin, to help with preparations for a sit-down strike scheduled for December 30th. But due to his unfamiliarity with the people in Flint, Roland didn't "really [get] much done" there. At the request of Adolph Germer (a representative of the nascent labor federation Congress of Industrial Organization that represented trade unions disaffected with the AFL), he went to Cleveland to help with a strike situation occurring there.[67] On December 30th, the Flint sit-downs began in both Fisher body no. 1 and no. 2 plants.

With the onset of the Flint sit-down strikes and the string of strikes and sit-downs of UAW locals in other GM plants across the country that followed, Local 14 sprung into action. On January 4th the Toledo Chevrolet workers walked out and shut down their plant. In making this decision as "undoubtedly…the most militant local in the General Motors Plants with a reputation that [was] envied by many locals in the Auto Industry" along with the lay offs they'd faced under the GM "decentralization program" they felt it was important that the local "take a prominent part in this strike."[68] As a result about half of the people in the local, around "several hundred at a time," went to Flint through out the sit down strike to bolster the efforts taking place there and to do "anything to participate in the strike" including maintaining a soup kitchen.[69] On one occasion when the numbers of workers sitting in at the Fisher body No.1 plant had dwindled, Travis called on Local 14 to send in reinforcements. His local responded, fearing that trouble was imminent in Flint, by sending up forty or fifty of the "toughest guys" they could find. According to a union steward in the plant he had

[67] Roland, interview with Mosier, August 12, 1981. p. 94
[68] "at a mass meeting" UAW Local 14 collection, Box 26, folder 15
[69] Ditzel, interview by Skeels, Sept. 25, 1960, p.12

"never seen a bunch of guys that were so ready for blood in [his] life."[70] On January 11th, when strikers repelled the Flint police and company guards from entering Fisher Body plant No. 2, in what later became famously known as "The Battle of the Running Bulls" Local 14 members were among those involved in this struggle. In a press release published three days after the event, the local wrote that it "was proud that many of its members took an active part in repelling the assault" and despite some of them being wounded would "not hesitate to go into action again if need be" to achieve the UAW International's demand for a national agreement.[71] In late January, Local 14 members Roland and Ditzel were also part of union conflicts in Anderson, Indiana and Saginaw, Michigan but due to GM-incited violence and police action in those areas, neither of those efforts turned out as successful as at Flint. [72] Finally on February 11th, ten days after the daring seizure of Chevrolet Plant #4 that tipped the balance of the Flint sit-down strike in the direction of the UAW, GM finally capitulated and agreed to a national agreement with the union.[73]

Conclusion

The victory that came out of Flint sit-down strike was, in part, a culmination of the rank and file energy among auto workers towards promoting and creating an International UAW that was militant and democratic in character. The 1935 Toledo Chevrolet Strike had helped advance this movement when, in its aftermath, AFL leadership decided to launch an International UAW. Moreover, Progressives from the Toledo FLU, especially those from the Chevy unit, during this time became a part in shaping and pushing forward this movement. In

[70] *Sit-down*, Sidney Fine, p. 169
[71] "Toledo, Ohio—1/14/37" UAW Local 14 collection, box 26, folder 15
[72] *Sit-down*, Sidney Fine, p. 196&197, p. 215 Ditzel was chased by vigilantes and escorted by police out of town, while Roland got kicked out Anderson, Indiana several hours after he'd arrived when police raided his hotel room
[73] *ibid*, p. 303.

this effort, leaders from the Toledo Chevy union spearheaded the initiative they began in their 1935 strike, national coordination of GM locals for a shared strike policy. With institutional support in place following the South Bend Convention of 1936, this effort to take on GM began in earnest and Flint, Michigan became the prime target. Once the sit-down strikes their got under way, volumes of militant support from Local 14 came up to take part in important moments of the strike that allowed it to progress.

CONCLUSION

The history of the UAW AFL FLU local #18384 from its birth into the creation of International UAW as Local #12 and #14 and the Flint sit-down strike of 1936-1937 reflects the broader evolution of these auto worker local unions from separate entities under control of the American Federation of Labor into a separate International UAW with a national orientation. This historical trajectory demonstrated the importance of FLU local #18384's community roots and the activism of its progressives leading to the UAW's national campaign against GM. At the time of the FLU local's founding, the Toledo labor movement had been effectively crushed under years of local business elite led union busting with support from the city government. Thus for the FLU local to ever become an established presence in the city's economy and gain union recognition as well as firm collective bargaining agency, it was going to have to confront this power structure. This challenge ultimately came from the Auto Lite Company whose management was prepared to go to the very limits to avoid recognizing organized labor in their plant. When the second strike in the Auto Lite plant came about on April 13th, the company wasted little time seeking to put this down several days later through an old legal weapon, the court injunction. Immediately the sympathetic judge ordered a restraining order on picketing while the injunction suit hearings took place and the FLU local union officers complied. Among the membership stirrings to take more direct action emerged as a group of the rank and file teamed up with the LCUL to purposefully violate this judicial order. This decision towards mass civil disobedience and the community upsurge that accompanied that effectively broke the picket restraining order ushered in the violent string of events that led to the eventual union agreement with the Auto Lite Company and in turn secured the position of organized labor in Toledo.

Out of this effective challenge to the business power structure over Toledo's economy, the resurgence of the city's labor movement along with the activities of progressives in the FLU local brought organizing into the Toledo Chevrolet plant. Owned by the national automobile corporation GM, the strike that took place in this factory in 1935 required a different strategy. To get significant concessions from this auto giant including a signed agreement, the Toledo strikers had to thoroughly cripple its national production which meant coordinating with other GM FLU locals to join in the walk out. Through this effort, they sought to create a joint strike policy to bring about a shared national agreement with GM. Though initially successful, both the efforts of Dillon along with the FLU local executive committee inhibited this national scheme. Eventually, Toledo Chevy workers accepted a less than desirable agreement put forth by GM that met few of their demands including a signed contract.

From this strike and the partial victory that resulted came a strong impetus for an International UAW of which the rank and file activity and energy within the Toledo FLU local now took on an increasing national dimension. Toledo progressives' desire for rank and file controlled unionism, especially among the Chevy leadership, brought them into a national grassroots movement emanating from Cleveland to promote an International UAW reflecting such a vision. At the top, the AFL leadership finally decided to launch the International UAW at the Detroit convention in August, 1935. Within FLU local#18384 many of the progressives were denied membership into the Toledo delegation to the convention including most of the Chevy leadership. This came about after the executive committee decided to appoint the delegates rather than let membership vote on them. Such an

action by the FLU local executive board as well as other lingering tensions between it and the Toledo Chevy shop, led the latter to seek a separate charter to become Local 14.

Later, when GM shifted out a significant amount of production from the Toledo Chevy plant UAW Local 14, became even more determined to achieve a national agreement with the auto giant. Bob Travis, Local 14's president, became the primary spearhead in this effort both in coordinating between GM UAW locals as well as organizing the Flint Sit-down strikes. Once the latter action was underway, Local 14 membership mobilized by shutting down its plant through a strike and then coming up to Flint, Michigan to support in anyway possible leading up to GM's eventual capitulation.

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