Aftermath

XI

In view of the nature of social and political controls in Anderson and the lack, as compared to Michigan, of any significant restraining influence exercised by state authority, it is not altogether surprising that the UAW local's celebration of its strike victory led to renewed discord and violence and to the dispatch of the Indiana National Guard to the troubled city. The Anderson UAW, in a possibly justified but nevertheless provocative action, had scheduled a "public trial" of Mayor Harry Baldwin and Chief of Police Joseph Carney for the evening of February 11 on the charge that they had failed to disperse the anti-union mobs on January 25 and 28. The conclusion of the strike transformed the affair into a projected victory meeting at which the terms of the February 11 agreement were to be explained to the assembled unionists.

The meeting was held in the Crystal Theater, a closed and condemned piece of property that was made available to the UAW by a Democratic state legislator after the union had failed to secure the use of any of the usual meeting places in the city. About a thousand unionists and sympathizers assembled inside the theater, while outside, after the meeting had been underway for about thirty minutes, an anti-union crowd estimated at anywhere from two hundred to fifteen hundred persons gathered. The throng outside was composed mainly of Guide Lamp personnel and included some minor GM supervisory officials, but the most reliable evidence indicates that the latter did not play a particularly active part in the proceedings. The angry mob, demanding that Victor Reuther and other outside union organizers be run out of town, pelted the building with rocks and rotten eggs, but the union allegation that shots were also being fired seems incorrect. The police, who had been asked for protection by Reuther, were present in force, but they made no serious effort to disperse the mob although they did prevent the anti-unionists from entering the building.

Police Chief Carney, who the UAW claimed had told the vigilantes, "'I'm with you boys,'" went into the theater and advised the persons in charge of the meeting that the crowd could be quieted if Reuther and the other non-Anderson organizers left the city. Carney urged that the meeting be adjourned and promised the organizers safe conduct out of town. Reuther put Carney's proposal to a vote of the audience, which decided unanimously that the union leaders should
not leave and that the entire group should remain in the theater until all could depart together. The unionists requested the police to use tear gas and fire hoses to disperse the crowd outside, but the police refused for fear, the mayor said, that such action would have “further infuriated” the mob. The beleaguered unionists then called for the use of state troops and police from the surrounding communities to provide the protection the Anderson police were failing to provide and also for the deputization by the governor of three hundred unionists but all to no avail. By about 4:00 or 5:00 A.M. the mob outside had thinned sufficiently to permit the union to send the women and children home under UAW guard, but Reuther and forty others, undoubtedly to dramatize the union’s plight, remained in the building until about 8:30. “I can assure you,” Reuther recalled many years later, “I aged ten years that night. I can still hear the whimpering of frightened women and children.”

When Reuther left the theater, he went directly to Indianapolis to complain to Governor M. Clifford Townsend about the “reign of terror” in Anderson and to request the state to protect the lives and civil liberties of the city’s unionists. Townsend promised to consider the dispatch of state police troopers to Anderson, but he took no immediate action. The events of the next few hours, however, finally persuaded the governor that the time had come for the state of Indiana to take command in Anderson.

The Anderson UAW not only appealed to state authorities for protection but also called for union reinforcements from Michigan. While the unionists were under siege in the Crystal Theater, Bob Travis interrupted a victory dance in the Pengelly Building, called forty to fifty trusted unionists together, and told them that the boys in Anderson needed their help. So often aided in the preceding few weeks by UAW members from outside their city, the Flint unionists piled into cars in the early hours of February 12 and left for Anderson. When they arrived in the nearby town of Alexandria, they were met by Anderson unionists who supplied them with pieces of gas pipe and clubs, and they later proceeded to union headquarters in Anderson.

During the course of the afternoon of February 12 Cecil Dunn, an Anderson UAW member whose brother had been assaulted outside the Crystal Theater the previous night, went with some companions to the Gold Band Tavern, a decrepit establishment near the Guide Lamp plant that was alleged to have been an anti-union hangout, to seek his brother’s reputed assailant. Precisely what happened in the tavern after Dunn’s arrival is unclear, but he apparently became involved in fisticuffs with someone in the tavern and was beaten up,
after which Emory Shipley, the owner of the establishment, covered Dunn and two of his friends with a rifle and ordered them from the building.  

Soon thereafter an unidentified person who looked like the victim of a recent physical assault—the UAW later concluded that it had probably been led into a trap—rushed into union headquarters and shouted “hysterically” that unionists were being manhandled at the Gold Band Tavern. Two or three carloads of Anderson and Flint unionists then sped to the tavern presumably to rescue their comrades. The stories of what occurred after they arrived on the scene are “vague” at best. Shipley claimed that 150 men surrounded the building, threw stones and fired shots at the establishment, and then “swarmed” into the barroom. In self-defense, he asserted, he fired his shotgun at the unionists, first from inside the tavern and then from the street, and drove them from the area. The regional director of the NLRB, however, reported that the unionists did not have firearms and that there was no evidence inside the tavern of shots having been fired into the building from the outside. It strains credulity, moreover, to believe that Shipley could singlehandedly have driven off an armed mob of 150 men. The UAW alleged that only a small handful of unionists had driven to the tavern, that Shipley began shooting at them as soon as they got out of their cars, and that only then did they begin throwing rocks at the building. At all events, ten unionists were wounded by gunfire, two of them quite seriously.  

Mayor Baldwin, learning from the Flint police that a large caravan of cars was proceeding from Flint to Anderson and alarmed further by the events at the Gold Band Tavern and by reports that armed men were appearing on the streets of Anderson, advised Governor Townsend that local authorities could no longer maintain peace and order in the city without outside assistance. The regional director of the NLRB thought it interesting that city officials who had previously given their “passive support or sympathy” to anti-union demonstrations and had not turned to the state for assistance had appealed to the governor for troops following “the first flare up” by the UAW.  

Governor Townsend, who had fended off union requests for protection in Anderson, responded quickly to Mayor Baldwin’s plea for help. He dispatched seven hundred National Guardsmen to the city on February 13 and placed Madison County, of which Anderson was the seat, under martial law. All crowds and pickets were ordered to disperse at once and all assemblages were prohibited. Only the military and the police were permitted to carry arms, and only persons authorized by the military were to be allowed to enter or leave the district. The state police imposed a virtual blockade at the Madison
County line and late on February 13 intercepted at Alexandria and escorted from the area three to four dozen car loads of out-of-state unionists, including some of the heroes of the Flint strike, who were rushing to Anderson in answer to Victor Reuther’s plea for help. The unionists innocently claimed that they were on their way to Anderson for a UAW parade, but the state police found clubs and baseball bats, although no firearms, in their possession.\textsuperscript{11}

The UAW in Anderson complained bitterly about the restrictions imposed upon its activities while martial law prevailed in the city. “It’s a mess here,” Reuther told Travis on the phone on February 13; “the Governor won’t give a damn thing.” Reuther’s remarks illuminated for Travis one of the major reasons for the difference between Flint and Anderson as strike cities. “That God damn Governor,” he replied to Reuther, “I guess we will have to move Michigan to Indiana or make Murphy president.”

The UAW also complained that twenty unionists and sympathizers, thirteen of them from Flint and including the unionists wounded at the Gold Band Tavern, were being held incommunicado by the Guard after their arrest following the tavern affray but that Shipley had not even been arrested. “Anderson situation desperate,” an American Civil Liberties Union representative wired Roger Baldwin. “Militia ruthlessly suppresses democratic prerogatives.” Baldwin was advised, however, that the UAW was itself guilty of violence, and Charles B. Salyer, the Anderson attorney who had previously worked closely with the UAW, complained to the La Follette Committee about the union’s readiness to take the law into its own hands. “Violence and murder are in the air,” Mary Heaton Vorse reported from Anderson on February 16.\textsuperscript{12}

The news coming out of Anderson from union and pro-union sources was, however, overly pessimistic. The twenty military prisoners were turned over to civil authorities on February 18, and the next day nineteen of them were indicted by a Madison County grand jury on a “rout and riot” charge, and sixteen of them were additionally charged with malicious trespass. A hearing was set for March 10, but in the meantime life returned to something approaching normal in Anderson, and in the end the accused were not brought to trial. The prisoners were released on bail after they had been indicted, and the military relaxed its restrictions on union activities. On February 23 martial law was terminated in Anderson, and the remnants of the Guard that had remained in the city was withdrawn.\textsuperscript{18}

The shape of things to come in employer-employee relations in the automobile industry appeared to be as evident in Anderson as
elsewhere in the nation in the weeks that followed the close of the GM strike. Delco-Remy and Guide Lamp resumed operations without incident on February 15 after GM had announced the abolition of the incentive pay system in the plants to which the local UAW had objected. The vigilantes in Anderson, allegedly because the governor had “put the bee” on city officials, were “driven undercover,” and the union carried on its organizing drive without molestation. Victor Reuther reported to Homer Martin at the end of March that negotiations with the local GM management were “progressing very well” and that “the sentiment of the workers” was “rapidly changing.” The UAW had apparently become “a force” to be reckoned with in a city that only a short time before had been a bastion of the open shop. “The men and women who fought on the picket line; who withstood the terror of vigilantes; who braved cold weather; who kept their faith under trying conditions; these people,” the union newspaper triumphantly asserted at the end of the strike, “changed the conditions in the shops.” The union leadership, however, was excessively optimistic about the trend of industrial relations in Anderson. Although there were some encouraging signs from the union point of view in the few weeks after the close of the strike, the UAW would be unable to establish itself securely in Guide Lamp and Delco-Remy until many more months had passed.  

In Flint the conclusion of the GM strike left the city with two labor disputes still unresolved, the sit-down strike that had begun on December 30 at the Standard Cotton Products Company, which manufactured upholstery material for Fisher Body, and the outside strike of the Flint Trolley Coach Company employees. The former dispute was settled on February 16, with the largely “forgotten” workers receiving a substantial wage increase; and the eighty-seven-day bus strike came to an end on March 4 after negotiations involving the UAW as the representative of the workers, federal conciliators, and Frank Murphy. The echoes of the GM strike continued to be heard in Flint after February 11. GM had agreed to consent to the dismissal of the injunction suits against the union, and the company sought in good faith to implement this part of the strike agreement, but Judge Gadola had other ideas about the matter. When approached by GM counsel on the subject, he took the position that the injunction itself was “out of commission” since the UAW had evacuated company
property but that he would not dismiss the writ of attachment until Martin and fourteen other UAW officials and strike leaders had apologized to the court for their "contemptuous action," which was in no way affected by the February 11 settlement. When Martin testified before the Dies Committee on December 1, 1938, he noted that the writ remained in effect and that the court still had not received the apology it desired; and there the matter rested.  

The charges of engaging in unlawful assembly and malicious destruction of property brought against Victor and Roy Reuther, Kraus, Travis, and three others after the Battle of the Running Bulls were pending when the strike ended. After the charges had been dismissed against all the defendants but Victor Reuther, the union generalissimo of the January 11 encounter, the UAW insisted that Joseph, a GM stockholder, should not prosecute the case and Gadola, because of his involvement in the injunction suit, should not preside at the trial. Attorney General Raymond W. Starr obliged the union by helping to make the necessary arrangements with Gadola for the appointment of a special prosecutor and the assignment of the case to a different Circuit Court judge, but in the end the charges against Reuther were dismissed on a technicality.  

City Manager Barringer was the principal city official to feel the backlash of the union victory in the GM strike and the altered structure of power in Flint. On February 15 the city commission restored to Barringer the extraordinary powers it had temporarily vested in the mayor on February 8, but eight days later the commission, by a five to three vote, dismissed Barringer from his post. The criticism of the city manager centered on his provocative mobilization of the civilian police reserve during the strike, but the three Green Slate commissioners had actually been seeking Barringer’s scalp since their election in November, 1936. Barringer’s successor, W. G. Findlater, was, interestingly enough, considered to be pro-CIO. In an action of considerable interest to the UAW, he sought to demote Chief of Police Wills to the position of supervisor of traffic safety, only to be balked by the city’s Civil Service Commission. Findlater then fired Wills, but the Civil Service Commission restored him to his post.  

Concerned lest there be trouble in the city before all GM units had resumed normal production, the National Guard demobilized in Flint on a gradual basis, not completing the process until February 20. As one truckload of Guardsmen left the city, they spontaneously began singing “Solidarity Forever,” the song that they had so often heard sung during their tour of duty in Flint. This brought an
inquiry to Michigan’s adjutant general from Major General Albert H. Blanding, the chief of the National Guard Bureau. Bersey replied that a “partial investigation” revealed that there was nothing to the story, but his research left something to be desired.\textsuperscript{19}

The behavior of the Guard in Flint elicited a great deal of praise from responsible officials. Murphy said that he had “never seen a military situation handled better,” an observation that although intended as a compliment of the Guard might also have been construed as a favorable reflection upon its commander-in-chief. Both Wolcott and Bradshaw commended glowingly on the “conduct, courtesy and efficiency” of the Guard, and Bradshaw thought it remarkable that so many Guardsmen could have been deployed in the city for so long a time and yet have behaved so admirably and in such a disciplined manner. Colonel Lewis concluded that the tour of duty had “demonstrated that effective use can be made of troops at such times without loss of life or destruction [sic] to property, and the troops to remain in [the] good graces of the community.”\textsuperscript{20}

Lewis’ judgment was accurate and to the point. Not only had Guard leaders restrained their own men from untoward acts, but, as the assistant chief of staff pointed out, they had tried to make all parties in Flint realize that “personal and group differences of opinion should be subordinated” so that nothing would occur in Flint that might “jeopardize the success” of the negotiations the governor was conducting in an effort to settle the strike.\textsuperscript{21} The Guard had played an important part in arranging the January 26 truce that preceded the resumption of work in some of GM’s Flint plants and the midnight truce of February 3 that lessened the threat of vigilante action against the strikers; it had helped to defeat Arnold Lenz’s effort to recapture the Chevrolet No. 4 plant on February 10; and it had, if anything, strengthened Murphy’s resolve not to order an assault upon the occupied plants to enforce the Gadaola injunction. At least part of the credit for the peaceful outcome of the Flint strike must be accorded the Michigan National Guard.

Guard officials and particularly Judge Advocate General Samuel D. Pepper thought that there were lessons to be learned by the Guard from its Flint tour of duty. Pepper recommended changes in the legislation pertaining to the Guard designed to protect the soldiers against the kind of financial problems that they had experienced at the outset of their Flint service, and his proposals were accepted by the Michigan legislature. Pepper was particularly concerned about the lack of training of officers and men for the type of riot duty to which they had been assigned in Flint. The problem, as he expressed
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it, was “to tone down the whole military machine to the level of the peace officer’s conception of enforcing the laws, after the machine has been trained in the methods and acts of actual warfare.”

Pepper thought that each state should have a military organization trained in advance to deal with domestic disturbances, as distinguished from its role in national defense, so that when troops were employed to aid civil authorities in local law enforcement, “proper and legal restraints” could be enforced to avoid unnecessary bloodshed and the use of “wholly unnecessary force” against mobs, individuals, and property. Bersey, however, feared that if Guardsmen were given the same kind of training that peace officers received, the public might conclude that the Guard was being prepared for use against the citizens of the state. He advised Governor Murphy in August, 1937, that some training in dealing with civil disturbances was already being provided by the Guard and that division commanders were free to increase such training if they deemed this proper.22 Thirty years later the adequacy of the National Guard’s training for dealing with domestic disturbances became a live issue once again in Michigan and elsewhere in the nation although the focus of concern now was on racially motivated civil disorder rather than on labor strife.

As work resumed in the various GM plants—all of the company’s motor-vehicle factories were in operation by February 18—Homer Martin announced, “We are in a reconstruction period following the war, and it requires cooperation and patience on the part of all.” A few weeks later Martin commented, “Some of the General Motors plant managers haven’t realized that the civil war is over,” a true enough observation but one that applied with equal force to many of Martin’s own followers. The heritage of strife between the UAW and GM, the union’s view that the corporation had sought to throttle it by resort to unfair labor practices and the corporation’s belief that Communists and “outside agitators,” aided and abetted by leftist politicians, had employed the illegal sit-down strike to force concessions from the company, created an atmosphere of animosity and resentment in GM plants that was hardly conducive to the establishment of harmonious employer-employee relations. Ten years after the sit-down strike “the scars of the early conflict were [still] plainly visible in spite of a decade of collective bargaining.”23

GM remained as unwilling after the strike as before the dispute to concede that the solution of its industrial-relations problems involved the establishment of outside unionism in its plants. It thus advised the Special Conference Committee that the leaders of the sit-down had been unionists for only a brief period and that the corporation had erred in “not watching such individuals who are aggressive and have initiative’ ” and in failing to provide them with
“‘special training and inducements to keep them satisfied.’” GM told its supervisory personnel that the strike had been precipitated by “‘foreign elements’ from outside the Corporation” who, despite the “great progress . . . in practically all phases of employee relations,” had taken advantage of “the active dissatisfactions of relatively small numbers.” The way to prevent a recurrence of trouble, GM concluded, was not to welcome the advent of unionism in its plants but rather to strengthen the “inside situation” so that it would become “an effective seal” against the intrusion of “‘destructive external factors.’” As a possible first step to strengthen the “inside situation,” GM replaced Evan J. Parker as the plant manager of Fisher Body Nos. 1 and 2. Ironically, Parker, who was now deemed guilty of having allowed a strike to develop in his plants, had originally received his assignment as a consequence of the 1930 strike in Fisher Body No. 1.25

UAW members, as unfamiliar as GM with the conduct of stable employer-employee relations and assuming that victory in the strike would produce some radical change in the structure of status and power in GM plants, were reluctant to accept the customary discipline exercised by management, and they “ran wild in many plants for months.” Union committeemen aggressively pressed the grievances of union members upon oftentimes unyielding foremen, and as one UAW member later conceded, “every time a dispute came up the fellows would have a tendency to sit down and just stop working.”26

To be sure, reasonably harmonious relations between union and management prevailed in some GM automobile plants following the strike, but in many of the corporation's factories the UAW complained bitterly of discrimination against union members and of efforts by foremen to intimidate workers. The UAW was particularly critical of management behavior in the Flint Chevrolet complex where, in addition to the usual grievances, the union charged that its old antagonist, Arnold Lenz, had armed about one thousand nonunion workers with specially manufactured clubs and was marching them through the plant so as to intimidate union and potential union members. Knudsen conceded that the men had been armed, but he insisted that their only purpose was “to guard against riot” and that the extra pay they were receiving, about which the union had also complained, was for work outside regular shift hours. Harold Cranefield, a La Follette Committee investigator, accepted the union’s charges of intimidation and recommended that Senator La Follette should ask Murphy “to crack down on Knudsen with particular reference to [the] Flint Chevrolet plant.”27

The first post-settlement strike in the GM complex took place in St. Louis. When the Chevrolet plant in that city reopened on February 16, the foremen, according to the report of an NLRB attorney,
looked on while nonunion assailants, including a confessed murderer, beat up UAW members. The use of physical force against unionists, coupled with the usual allegations of discrimination, led to a sit-down on February 18 that was settled in a matter of hours and led to the complete organization of the Chevrolet plant.  

The St. Louis strike was followed eight days later by a strike at Janesville Fisher Body. When work had resumed in Janesville following the February 11 settlement, the union men wore their UAW buttons to work, and so the “loyal” workers of the Alliance decided to do the same. In contravention of management rules, a UAW member in Fisher Body booted an Alliance button-wearer and was promptly dismissed. Unionists in the dismissed worker’s department thereupon refused to work until their comrade would be restored to his job, and this led to a shutdown of the entire Fisher Body unit and of Chevrolet as well. The somewhat ridiculous but nevertheless revealing “battle of the buttons” was settled to the union’s satisfaction on March 1, and the plant reopened the next day. 

There were very brief sit-downs at the Cleveland Fisher Body plant on March 4 and the Buick plant the next day, and then on Saturday night March 6 the smoldering trouble at the Flint Chevrolet plant culminated in a sit-down in the No. 4 and No. 8 units that quickly idled sixty-five hundred workers. The strikers barred the gates of the two plants to all but union members, scores of workers went home to pick up a supply of clothing in preparation for a prolonged stay in the plants, and Emergency Brigade members quickly appeared outside Chevrolet. The UAW agreed to evacuate the plants after three hours, however, on the condition that the affected establishments should remain closed for the rest of the night and that there be a conference between the union and the management when Chevrolet reopened on Monday.

The resumption of work on the morning of March 8 brought discord, however, rather than concord. Without waiting for the projected conference to resume, five hundred workers in Chevrolet No. 4 sat down once again, allegedly because the company had refused a union request to discharge or at least transfer a nonunionist in the plant, an action that idled about sixty-four hundred workers in four Chevrolet units. Some six-eight hundred Fisher Body No. 1 workers were also thrown out of work later the same day as the result of a sit-down in the plant by about seven hundred workers in two departments who were seeking an immediate wage increase. After a day of idleness, a temporary armistice was arranged, the sit-downers evacuated the two plants, and work resumed the next day.

Travis wrote Henry Kraus that “everything” was “lovely” follow-
ing the two Chevrolet sit-downs, but what had happened in Flint was indicative of the chaotic state of industrial relations in GM following the February 11 settlement. It would appear that the strikes in both Chevrolet and Fisher Body had been illegally called by shop stewards who had not bothered to consult with union organizers. Flint plant managers, bewildered by what was going on in the shops, complained with at least some justification that they simply did not know what the UAW wanted.31

The sit-downs and slowdowns in GM plants had their repercussions on the negotiations between corporation and union representatives that began in Detroit on February 16 in accordance with the terms of the February 11 settlement. As the talks drew to a close, Vice-President Charles E. Wilson, the principal GM negotiator, complained about the eighteen sit-downs that had occurred in GM plants in the previous twenty days. “We don’t like it,” he told reporters, and he expressed concern as to whether the UAW could be expected to observe the new contract in view of its alleged failure to have abided by the February 11 terms. Ed Hall retorted for the union that it was the company that had been responsible for the post-settlement strikes, but the UAW at the same time denied that it had called the strikes, which was probably correct, and it gave assurances that work stoppages would cease.32

The principal feature of the new GM-UAW contract, to which the negotiators agreed on March 12,33 was the elaborate grievance procedure that it instituted for all of GM’s motor-vehicle plants. The agreement provided for the establishment of shop committees in each of the GM plants, consisting of from five to nine employees. Grievances of individual workers or groups of workers were to be taken up initially with the appropriate foreman and, if not satisfactorily adjusted, could then be referred by stages that involved the participation of the shop committee for eventual joint review by the president of the UAW, the appropriate GM vice-president, and such additional representatives as the two parties desired. If a grievance could not be resolved at even this level, the two parties, by mutual agreement, could refer it to an impartial umpire.

The grievance procedure accorded the UAW effective recognition in all of GM’s automotive plants, not just in the seventeen plants where it temporarily enjoyed a somewhat special position. It was in this sense a distinct gain for the union, but it fell considerably short of what the UAW had been seeking in the negotiations. The union had failed to gain recognition of its prized system of shop stewards, and it was altogether dissatisfied with the nine-man limitation imposed on the shop committees, which contrasted sharply with the
UAW practice of having one shop steward for every twenty-five workers. The inadequacy of a shop committee of at most nine members in plants with thousands of workers was rather obvious, and it led to difficulties in many places.\textsuperscript{84}

The UAW was unsuccessful in its efforts to have seniority determined on the basis of service alone, as it had requested in its January 4 demands, but it did secure some alteration in the old ALB rules that GM was at the time following. The management continued to have the right to prepare a separate list of employees—the equivalent of the Class D workers under the ALB rules—who in its judgment should be retained or reemployed, regardless of other seniority provisions, so as “to facilitate tooling or rearrangement of the plant, the taking of inventory and the starting of production or similar situations”; but in making up the list management was henceforth to give “reasonable consideration” to length of service, and the members of the shop committees were to be included on the list, a provision that the UAW hoped would persuade able men to seek positions on these committees.\textsuperscript{85}

Length of service was otherwise to determine the order of layoff and rehiring except that if in its judgment production in a particular plant was to be reduced substantially for an extended period of time and would thus create “a social problem” in the community, the management could modify the rule “in a manner satisfactory to the employees” so as to give preference to workers with dependents. Since the UAW had consistently opposed the preference in layoff and rehiring given to employees with dependents under the ALB rules, the new provision, although it did not entirely eliminate dependency as a factor in calculating job tenure rights, was for the union a step in the right direction. The UAW also realized one of its seniority objectives in the agreement’s provision that during extended periods of reduced production, temporary employees, defined as workers with less than six months of employment, were to be laid off and the work week was to be reduced before employees with seniority were laid off.

The UAW failed, in the main, to secure its demands with regard to wages, hours, and the timing of operations. It had pressed for the abolition of incentive pay systems throughout GM, but the agreement left the matter of wage payment plans to be settled by local plant managers in accordance with the wishes of the employees involved, GM stating that it had no preference regarding such plans. The UAW had also sought a national minimum wage for GM workers, but the agreement accepted the GM position that wage rates had to be determined by local plant managements in consonance with local conditions. It was provided, however, that when wage complaints
could not be settled by local plant managers or where minimum wage rates became a matter of dispute, they could be dealt with according to the grievance procedure, which meant that they could ultimately be referred to the highest levels of the union and the corporation. With regard to hours, the agreement confirmed the existing corporation policy—the forty-hour week, the eight-hour day, and time-and-a-half for overtime—rather than meeting the UAW's demand for the thirty-hour week, the six-hour day, and the usual overtime provision.

In its January 4 demands the UAW had called for the mutual determination by the union and the management of the speed of production, an issue of crucial importance for the union. Again, however, the UAW fell short of its goal. The March 12 agreement stated that time studies were to be made "on the basis of fairness and equity consistent with quality of workmanship, efficiency of operations and the reasonable working capacities of normal operators" and that the local management was to have "full authority" to determine these matters. If, however, an employee or group of employees was dissatisfied with the timing for a job and the foreman could not adjust the complaint, the job was to be restudied and an adjustment was to be made if the timing was found to be unfair. This gave the union a voice, but not really an equal voice, in the determination of production standards. The UAW's January 4 demand for the reinstatement of employees who had been discharged "unjustly" was resolved by referring the matter to the established grievance procedure and by providing that employees who were reinstated following a discharge were to be returned to work of a similar type and at the same rate of pay, which accorded with union principles.

GM, understandably intent on putting a stop to the wave of wildcat strikes it was experiencing, secured a clause in the agreement providing that there were to be no work stoppages because of employee grievances until every effort had been made to adjust the complaints through the grievance procedure and the UAW international officers had given their approval. The conditions stipulated before a strike could occur implied a degree of discipline in the union that did not exist at that time. The agreement was to continue in force until terminated by either party or altered by the consent of both. Either party could cancel the agreement by giving sixty-day notice to the other, but no notice to terminate or modify the agreement could be given prior to June 11, 1937, which meant the continuation of the contract at least until August 11, 1937, the last day of the company's six-month commitment to Murphy and the UAW.

When the contract terms were agreed upon, Wyndham Mortimer, who along with Hall and Brophy had conducted the negotia-
tions for the UAW, conceded that the agreement left "much to be desired" from the union point of view, but he thought that its terms could be "conscientiously" recommended to the delegates from the GM locals, who had to approve the contract before it could go into effect. Two hundred union representatives considered the document for thirteen hours on March 13 before giving it their assent. There were complaints about the provisions regarding hours and wages, the degree of recognition, and the failure to incorporate the steward system. Hall, however, advised the delegates that "we can't expect to get everything at once," and Mortimer, appealing for support and indicating his impatience with the lack of discipline in the union, reportedly remarked, "We've been pretty liberal with you fellows. We've sanctioned all of your strikes even though we didn't know a thing about them beforehand." 36

Knudsen insisted that the agreement did not depart "very much" from the corporation's unilaterally proclaimed statement of its collective-bargaining policy of August, 1934, but simply spelled out that policy in "greater detail" in so far as "procedure" was concerned. 37 This was the same line that GM took with its supervisory personnel, whom it told that events of the "recent stress period" had demonstrated the soundness of "the basic principles and underlying philosophy" of the corporation's policy regarding collective bargaining. Consistent with its long-standing preference for dealing with individuals rather than organizations, GM stressed to its foremen and executives that it was their responsibility to correct and eliminate "sources of irritation or complaint within the organization" so that it would be unnecessary to invoke the grievance procedure. Refusing to acknowledge that the issue of power was also involved, GM continued to insist that most problems in the plant were the result of individual difficulties and that their early detection would tend to eliminate the need for the formal bargaining procedure altogether.

GM was to discover, however, that its analysis of employer-employee relations was far too simplistic and that its advice to its foremen was a counsel of perfection to which it proved impossible for them to adhere. It was in the area of the recognition of the union, an issue of power, and in the changes wrought with regard to such matters as seniority and the timing of operations, not just in questions of detail, that the agreements of February 11 and March 12 most conspicuously departed from GM's August, 1934, statement. GM would now have to train its supervisory staff not just to be alert to the problems of individuals, crucial as that matter was, but also in the procedures for dealing with labor organizations, and the corporation
would find it necessary to augment its industrial-relations staff in both Detroit and in the divisions.38

The UAW realized when the GM sit-down strike came to an end that it was faced with “the greatest opportunity” in its history to enlist the unorganized automobile workers and that it must in the next six months overwhelm GM’s anti-union defenses. The union lowered its initiation fee for a trial period, substantially increased its organizing staff, and aggressively pushed an organizing campaign. The results obtained in a short span of time were remarkable. The dues-paying membership, a rock-bottom indication of union strength, soared from about eighty-eight thousand in February to 166,000 in March, 254,000 in April, and close to 400,000 by the middle of October.39 Although there is a tendency in the literature to assign a major role to the NLRA in explaining the momentous labor gains of the 1930’s, it is noteworthy that the initial breakthrough in the automobile industry came before the constitutionality of the statute was upheld by the United States Supreme Court.

The GM strike itself was undoubtedly the major factor in the UAW’s rapid emergence as one of the largest labor organizations in the United States. Not only did the strike lessen the fear of the workers that they would suffer discrimination if they identified with the UAW, but it provided the necessary ingredient for the building of a union, the element of success—the UAW could now tell the auto workers that it was an organization that had “fought and won” for its members and that would continue to fight for them. The effect, as Mortimer recalled, was “like a huge reservoir bursting.” It “seemed to open the flood gates of organization.” Workers in the mass now joined the union. “There was no type,” Norman Bully remembered, “the young fellows, the older men, everyone seemed equally to desire the union, to want the union, and support the union.” Organizing was “no problem,” one of the UAW’s Detroit organizers recalled, “I did not have to go out and seek members, they were seeking me.”40

The appeal of the UAW in GM plants following the strike was strengthened and given substance by the day-to-day victories the union was achieving—the pay raises that were won in various plants, the acceleration of the shift to hourly rates, the retiming of jobs, the reinstatement of discharged workers, the preparation of seniority lists available to union representatives, and the hundreds of minor grievances that were adjusted. The sit-downs and quickie strikes in the plants may have been called without proper authorization, but when the settlements effected by union organizers resulted in the adjustment of the grievances of individual workers or groups of
employees, the union enhanced its appeal to the workers. These strikes, Roy Reuther later declared, were "the greatest organizers."41

The effect on the employees of the changes taking place in shop conditions was noted early in March by a Fisher Body No. 1 worker who had opposed the strike and the UAW but who revised his opinion about both after returning to work. "The inhuman high speed," he wrote, "is no more. We now have a voice, and have slowed up the speed of the line. And [we] are now treated as human beings, and not as part of the machinery. The high pressure is taken off. . . . It proves clearly that united we stand, divided or alone we fall."42

The GM sit-down was followed on March 8 by another sit-down directed at the second largest producer in the automobile industry at that time, Chrysler Corporation. The Chrysler UAW leadership had dispatched representatives to Flint during the GM strike to study the tactics the strikers were employing, and it sought to apply what it had learned in its own strike. "Of course," one of the Chrysler strike leaders recalled, "we had the experience of the General Motors boys. . . . I mean it was a little easier for us than it was for the . . . boys in Flint."43

Chrysler secured an injunction against the strikers, and this time Murphy made it unmistakably clear that he would use force, if necessary, to clear the plants. He was, however, able to persuade both sides to accept the kind of truce that he had pressed for unsuccessfully during the GM strike: the union evacuation of the Chrysler plants in return for a company promise that it would make no effort to resume production while strike talks were underway and the stationing of state police around the plants to guarantee the observance of the agreement. As in the GM sit-down, the Chrysler strikers were seeking recognition for the UAW as the exclusive bargaining agency for the company's workers; but in the settlement agreed to on April 6 they received recognition of the union for its members only, although the company promised neither to assist nor to bargain with any other group for the purpose of "undermining" the UAW, and Walter Chrysler may have given private assurances to the union that went beyond this concession.44 In the succeeding days and weeks, the UAW, in some instances as the result of strikes, secured agreements from Hudson, Reo, Packard, Studebaker, and numerous parts producers. By the summer of 1937 only Ford among important producers in the automobile industry had been able to stem the union advance.45

The UAW, however, was an organization beset with serious internal problems and divisions. Two rival groups contended for control of the union: the so-called Progressive Caucus, led by Homer Martin and Richard Frankensteen and including some Lovestone-
and the so-called Unity Caucus, in which Communist and Socialist elements were conspicuously present. Martin complained that the numerous sit-down strikes called after March 12—their number had reached 170 by the middle of June—were intended to promote factional ends, but he was unable to curb the strikes partly because the international lacked adequate authority, partly because he did not wish to appear to be surrendering to the demands of the automobile manufacturers.

The problems of the UAW were compounded in the fall of 1937 when economic recession added to the difficulties the faction-torn organization was experiencing. The return of good times improved organizational prospects but did nothing to restore internal harmony. The dispute between the Martin and anti-Martin factions degenerated into almost open warfare in 1938 and 1939, culminating in April, 1939, when Martin, whose influence and prestige were rapidly waning, led a rump of the union into the AFL. When NLRB elections were held in GM’s plants on April 17, 1940, the UAW-CIO registered a majority in forty-eight of the plants with 120,000 workers, the UAW-AFL in only five plants with fifty-six hundred workers.

In subsequent contract negotiations with GM the UAW-CIO finally realized a long-coveted goal by gaining recognition as the sole bargaining agency in the plants where it had won a majority of the vote. By the time the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, the UAW-CIO was paying a per capita tax on a membership of 649,000, and in another six months it was to subdue the last anti-union stronghold in the industry, the Ford Motor Company. What the organization had accomplished in the few short years since the international union had been established represented, as Walter Galenson has observed, “one of the most impressive achievements in the history of American labor.”

The GM sit-down strike not only stimulated the rapid growth of unionism in the automobile industry but in the mass-production industries in general, thus demonstrating to a degree the validity of Joseph Shister’s theory that union growth in one sector of the economy may be “a necessary condition for growth in another relevant sector.” The effects of the strike, the CIO’s organ noted on March 1, “continue to spread over the labor waters like waves and ripples in the wake of a boat that is forging ahead.” As if to demonstrate the accuracy of this figure of speech, there came the startling news the next day that the great United States Steel Corporation, long a stronghold of the open shop, had come to terms with the Steel Workers’ Organizing Committee without a strike. Although other factors were clearly involved, the management of the company, observ-
The sit-down strategy of the GM strike of 1936-1937 had undoubtedly concluded that a prolonged and costly steel strike was pointless if United States Steel in the end would have to make concessions analogous to those GM had been compelled to make. As John L. Lewis privately observed just after the steel settlement had been consummated, the GM strike had had “a sweeping effect on steel” and had broken “the united financial front” that had opposed the CIO.

The capitulation of United States Steel, another CIO victory achieved before the NLRA was declared constitutional, further enhanced the prestige of the Lewis organization and increased its appeal to the unorganized. Soon the CIO included within its ranks workers in the oil fields, metal mines, and logging camps and in the textile, shoe and leather, electrical, radio, maritime, and furniture industries, street-car operators, government employees, and even newspaper reporters. “Around mammoth modern mills and at bleak old factories, on ships and on piers, at offices and in public gathering-places, men and women roared, ‘C.I.O.! C.I.O.!’ . . . Labor was on the march as it had never been before in the history of the Republic.” By the time of its first national convention in October, 1937, the CIO had thirty-two national affiliates and a claimed membership of four million. The Lewis organization almost certainly exaggerated the number of its adherents, but this does not detract from the remarkable character of its achievements during the first ten months of 1937.48

The GM strike not only stimulated the growth of the CIO, but it also exacerbated the tensions between the Lewis group and the AFL and made a reconciliation between them even more difficult to achieve. The Federation’s efforts in the strike to counter the UAW’s demand for exclusive representation were bitterly resented by the industrial union forces. Lewis described Green’s call to Murphy on February 6 as “treason to the labor movement” and “an act of moral turpitude,” and Van A. Bittner of the CIO wired Green just after his intervention in the Detroit negotiations that the AFL Executive Council included “men who face this battle between the automobile workers and General Motors with only one thought in mind—to drive the automobile workers back to work so that it might be said that the Committee for Industrial Organization is a failure.” When the strike was over, Martin denounced Green as “the modern Judas Iscariot of the labor movement,” and the Policy Committee of the United Mine Workers (UMW) condemned both Green and Frey for “their gratuitous, insulting, anti-union, strike-breaking statements” regarding the February 11 settlement and authorized the union’s international officers to expel the AFL president from the UMW.49

Quite apart from its momentous significance for the organization
of the unorganized and its effect on the rivalry of the AFL and the CIO, the GM strike, as a spectacular and successful example of the sit-down, greatly increased the popularity of the tactic. Whereas only forty-eight of 2712 strikes in 1936, affecting less than eighty-eight thousand workers, had been of the sit-down variety, 477 of the 4749 strikes in 1937 were sit-downs that lasted at least one day, and they affected approximately 400,000 workers, about one-third of whom actually remained inside the plants. The sit-downs involved every conceivable type of worker—kitchen and laundry workers in the Israel-Zion Hospital in Brooklyn, pencil makers, janitors, dog catchers, newspaper pressmen, sailors, tobacco workers, Woolworth girls, rug weavers, hotel and restaurant employees, pie bakers, watchmakers, garbage collectors, Western Union messengers, opticians, and lumbermen. The largest number of sit-downs occurred in the textile industry, where there were eighty such strikes in 1937, as compared to forty-five in the automobile industry.50

There were twenty-five sit-down strikes in January, 1937, affecting 74,479 workers, and forty-seven in February affecting 31,236 workers. The sit-down movement reached its all-time high in March when 170 such strikes involved 167,210 workers. Detroit was at the center of the sit-down strike storm in that month, and the tactic had become so ubiquitous that a Detroit News reporter remarked, “Sitting down has replaced baseball as a national pastime, and sitter-downers clutter up the landscape in every direction.” Time thought that Detroiters were “getting an idea of what a revolution feels like,” and some of the city’s inhabitants undoubtedly agreed, but the shrewd Detroit newsman W. K. Kelsey was closer to the truth when he commented, “Those strikers have no more idea of ‘revolution’ than pussy-cats.” April, 1937, the month of the Jones and Laughlin decision upholding the NLRA, saw a decline in the number of sit-downs to fifty-eight, affecting 83,389 workers, and during the remainder of the year the tactic fell into increasing disfavor among the workers. There were only four sit-downs in December, and they affected a mere 357 workers.51

Of the 477 sit-downs in 1937, 279 were called by CIO affiliates and one hundred by AFL affiliates. The CIO did not formally and officially sanction the sit-down as a strike tactic, but neither would it condemn the device, and it recognized that it might be a useful weapon to utilize against employers who refused to bargain. Speaking for the AFL at the end of March, 1937, William Green specifically disavowed the sit-down and denounced it as illegal, but AFL affiliates did not necessarily feel themselves constrained by this pronouncement.52
The sit-down strike was primarily utilized by workers seeking to gain recognition from recalcitrant employers: slightly more than half of the sit-down strikes in 1937 were for this purpose as compared to the 29.4 percent of the strikes directed at securing improved wages and hours. “Substantial gains” were achieved by the strikers in 50.8 percent of the 1937 sit-downs, compromises were worked out in 50.6 percent of the strikes, and little or no gain resulted from 14 percent of the strikes. Although the sit-down, “a weapon of minorities,” occurred in areas of the economy where unions were weak, the victory record for strikes of this type was somewhat in excess of the 46.4 percent victory figure for all strikes in 1937, which underscores the effectiveness of the technique and the major reason for its use.53

The sit-down strike, as already noted, enjoyed somewhat greater public support in January and February, 1937, than one might have anticipated, but when the sit-down reached epidemic proportions in March, it fell into increasing disrepute. In a Gallup poll published on March 21, 67 percent of the respondents thought that legislation should be passed declaring the sit-down illegal, and 65 percent in another poll published on July 4 thought that state and local governments should use force to eject sit-downers. The tactic was especially unpopular with farmers, inhabitants of small towns, and Republicans, less unpopular with city voters, young voters, and Democrats, and favored by people on relief.54

Despite the increasing unpopularity of the sit-down and the widespread willingness to see force used to eject sit-downers, there was very substantial opposition to the use of force if it meant bloodshed, a major deterrent, it will be recalled, in Murphy’s consideration of the problem. A poll published in Fortune in July, 1937, revealed that only 20.1 percent of the respondents believed that sit-downs should be halted even at the cost of bloodshed. Even among “executives” only a minority of 82.9 percent were prepared to see blood spilled if this were required to drive sit-downers from the plants that they occupied.55

It is not at all surprising that the wave of sit-down strikes, occurring at a time when the President was pressing his controversial plan to reorganize the Supreme Court, aroused fears among many Americans that the very foundations of the Republic were being undermined. “Armed insurrection—defiance of law, order and duly elected authority—is spreading like wildfire,” a group of Boston civic leaders wired the Senate late in March. “It is rapidly growing beyond control. . . . If minority groups can seize premises illegally, hold indefinitely, refuse admittance to owners or managers, resist by violence and threaten bloodshed all attempts to dislodge them, and
intimidate properly constituted authority to the point of impotence, then freedom and liberty are at an end, government becomes a mockery, superseded by anarchy, mob rule and ruthless dictatorship.”

The sit-down strike had few supporters in Congress, but only a handful of congressmen spoke out against it while the GM strike was underway. The most vociferous Congressional critic of the sit-down from the very outset was Representative Clare Hoffman, a Republican from Allegan, Michigan, who, as Stephen K. Bailey has pointed out, reflected “the provincialism and bigotry of undiluted Anglo-Saxon stock; the rugged individualism of the small-independent farmers.” While the GM strike was on, Hoffman charged that a union minority was defying the law but was being backed by Governor Murphy, and he criticized the silence of the President on the subject. On January 29 Hoffman introduced a resolution requesting the secretary of labor to answer a series of loaded questions designed to place both the strikers and the Department of Labor in an unfavorable light. William L. Connery, the chairman of the House Committee on Labor, informed the House on February 3 that his committee unanimously opposed the sit-down but, echoing the objections of Frances Perkins, that it was equally unanimous in reporting the resolution unfavorably since it would make the secretary of labor a “partisan,” would “muddy the waters,” and would interfere with Department of Labor efforts to compose the dispute. The resolution was then tabled.

Four days after the GM strike was settled, the La Follette Committee began its GM hearings. The purpose of the hearings, the historian of the committee has contended, was “to counter unfavorable public reaction to the sit-down strike” and to influence the negotiations then underway between the corporation and the UAW. During its week-long hearings the committee provided the UAW with a “national forum” to air its grievances against GM; and by exposing the corporation’s labor practices and particularly its use of espionage, the committee helped to place the strike in perspective and to demonstrate that wrong was not all on one side. When Hoffman rose in the House shortly after the GM hearings had been concluded to complain once again that Murphy had disregarded his oath of office in the GM strike, Frank Hook of Michigan retorted that Murphy, even though he had “held up the service of a few legal papers,” was to be congratulated for his conduct during the strike, a remark that brought applause from the assembled congressmen.

When the sit-down strike reached epidemic proportions in March, an increasing number of members of Congress began to direct
their fire at the tactic. Senator Hiram Johnson of California on March 17 characterized the sit-down as “the most ominous thing in our national economic life today,” and two days later Senator Allen J. Ellender of Louisiana expressed the view that the tactic was “abhorrent” and “un-American.” In the House, Dewey Short of Missouri was soon to charge that Michigan, which had once been a “State of law and order,” had become a “State of anarchy,” and he explained that he would not have found it necessary to make this criticism had Murphy possessed “a bone instead of a rubber band for a spine.” The debate in Congress was not entirely one-sided, however. A few members of the House defended the sit-down as legal, and Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York and others contended that GM’s protests about the illegality of the device were compromised by its own defiance of the NLRA, for which the La Follette Committee hearings had provided chapter and verse.61

On April 1, as Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg of Michigan reported it, there was “a great explosion . . . on the Floor of the Senate over sit-down strikes.” While the Senate was discussing the Guffey-Vinson coal bill, Senator James F. Byrnes of South Carolina, probably hoping to frustrate a CIO invasion of his state’s textile mills and possibly to force President Roosevelt to go on record against the sit-down, offered an amendment to the bill’s declaration of public policy that in effect prohibited sit-down strikes in the coal industry.

Senator Vandenberg then rose to say that the moment “this formula of violence” appeared in a community “the desperate result” was that “all the lawlessness, all the hoodlumism, all the syndicalism, and all the communism there is in the area rushes for the point to pour oil on the conflagration.” Vandenberg criticized Roosevelt’s long silence on the sit-down and insisted that both Congress and the executive branch had a “moral responsibility” to condemn the tactic. When the Michigan senator finished his address, Vice-President Garner, who was apparently no longer of the same opinion as he had been at the conclusion of the GM strike, rushed over to Vandenberg and declared, “‘I want to congratulate you; it was about time somebody said that!’”62

The Byrnes amendment was attacked by administration supporters partly because it singled out coal miners for special attention—Senator Matthew M. Neely of the coal state of West Virginia remarked that the amendment was as out of place in the coal bill as “a blacksnake would be at a ladies’ lawn party”—which prompted Byrnes on April 3 to withdraw it in favor of a resolution introduced by Senator Key Pittman of Nevada declaring it to be the sense of the Senate that the sit-down was “illegal and contrary to sound public
policy." The Pittman resolution was defeated that day by a 36–48 vote. Senator Joseph Robinson of Arkansas then collaborated with Pittman in devising a concurrent resolution that condemned the sit-down in the manner of the Pittman resolution but also declared it to be contrary to public policy for an employer to resort to labor espionage, deny the right of collective bargaining to his employees, foster company unions, or engage in any other unfair labor practices as defined in the NLRA. The resolution in this form was approved by the Senate on April 7 by an overwhelming 75–3 vote. Since it was a concurrent resolution, it was without legal force and did not require the signature of the President. It enabled the Senate to express its opinion on the sit-down without at the same time placing all the blame on labor and without in any way embarrassing the administration.63

In the House of Representatives, Martin Dies of Texas, anxious to strike at the aliens and radicals who he believed dominated the CIO, had introduced a resolution on March 23 calling for the appointment of a select committee of the House to investigate the sit-down tactic. The resolution emerged from the House Committee on Rules on April 2, the day after the Byrnes amendment had been introduced, but the administration marshalled its forces against the measure, and it went down to defeat on April 8 by a vote of 150 to 236.64 It was, however, only a temporary setback for Dies, who in the fall of the next year would have his investigation after all. This time, however, his primary target would be Governor Murphy rather than the CIO.

The subject of industrial relations bulked large in the speeches and statements of Murphy in the weeks and months that followed the GM strike. He defended the right of the workers to engage in collective bargaining and to have a voice in determining the conditions under which they labor, and he explained the sit-down and labor excesses as a reaction to a long history of "repression" by employers and government and to management's use of illegal and improper tactics to thwart organization. At the same time he stressed that personal liberties would be of little value unless property rights were protected and the integrity of the courts preserved. The recurrent theme in Murphy's numerous remarks on the labor problem—he was obviously rationalizing his behavior in the GM strike—was the need to settle the differences between labor and management by pacific means rather than by force and violence. His own restraint in the use of force, he insisted, had "strengthened rather than weakened government and the law." Had he used force to empty the plants, the state's government would have come to be regarded as "a horrible, oppres-
sive thing which coldly ignored human values and demanded human life as the price of its own ruthless supremacy.”

As the embodiment of the public interest, government, in Murphy's view, had to play a large role in the sphere of industrial relations. It should, above all, attempt to remove the causes for industrial conflict and to provide the necessary machinery to facilitate the composition of labor disputes. The industrial-relations bill that the Murphy administration drafted for the consideration of the Michigan legislature but which did not pass was designed to restrain the precipitate resort by labor and management to the strike or lockout and to provide for mediation and arbitration of industrial disputes. One section of the measure, reflecting Murphy's experience in the sit-down strikes, provided that whenever in a strike or lockout local police authorities were unable to maintain order or to protect the owners or operators of the property or those dealing with them in the peaceful exercise of their rights, the governor could place the establishment in the charge of the commissioner of the state police pending further efforts at mediation; and during this period the property was to remain closed or was to be permitted to operate under regulations consistent with the interests of the public and the parties affected.65

As the sit-down strike fever spread, Murphy increasingly stressed that "public order must be preserved and public authority must be respected," and, as Adolph Germer recorded in his diary after a conference with the governor during the Chrysler sit-down, "He deplored the sit-down strikes—taking 'possession' of other people's property.” He told a law-and-order conference that he had convened in Detroit on March 17 that public officials and the majority of the people were "gravely disturbed" by the large number of labor disputes and "a disposition in some quarters to ignore the law and violate the security and freedom of individuals and corporations in the exercise of their personal and property rights." He wished it to be known that "we have means to enforce respect for public authority and we propose to use them with proper vigor if need be."66

Murphy's conduct in the GM sit-down, which at the time the strike was concluded had seemed like a major political asset for the governor, turned into a political liability when that momentous dispute was followed not by industrial peace but by a rash of sit-down strikes in Michigan and elsewhere. Increasingly, the strikes were blamed on Murphy's failure to have enforced the law in Flint, and the governor's protestations that the sit-downs were not due to the GM strike but to "underlying reasons" and that his use of force in Flint would have led to even more severe labor troubles and possibly
to civil war failed to still the criticism. The publisher of the Adrian (Michigan) Daily Telegram contended that Flint had been the “first acid test” as to whether the law would be enforced in Michigan and that Murphy’s failure of the test “started and kept alive the reign of lawlessness” in the state. 67

Murphy’s conduct during the sit-down strikes, particularly during the GM strike, became a major political issue in Michigan. Meeting in their state convention on February 5 while the Flint strike was still on, Michigan Republicans deplored the “lawlessness” in Flint and attributed it to derelictions on Murphy’s part. Frank D. Fitzgerald, whom Murphy had defeated in 1936 and who was again to be the Republican gubernatorial nominee in 1938, declared at the same time, “I never expected to see the courts of Michigan absolutely ignored and laughed at.” 68

The Republicans were aided and abetted in their exploitation of the sit-down strike issue by the House Special Committee on Un-American Activities, the Dies Committee, which on October 18, 1938, while the Michigan gubernatorial campaign was in full swing, began hearings on the interconnections between Communism and the sit-down strikes. For four days a parade of witnesses, none of them friendly to Murphy, 69 stressed the Communist role in the strikes in testimony that was sometimes factually correct but sometimes was not. Murphy was brought under direct attack particularly by Gadola, who charged that the governor had prevented Wolcott from enforcing the law, and Barringer, who referred to Murphy’s “treasonable action.” 70

Murphy was anxious to appear before the Dies Committee to rebut what he considered inaccurate and “misleading testimony,” but it was decided in the end that the challenge to the committee should come from the President and not the governor. When Roosevelt was asked about the matter at his October 25 press conference, he submitted a written reply in which he stated that he was “disturbed not because of the absurdly false charges made by a coterie of disgruntled Republican officeholders [Gadola and Barringer] against a profoundly religious, able and law-abiding Governor but because a Congressional Committee charged with the responsibility of investigating un-American activities should have permitted itself to be used in a flagrantly unfair and un-American attempt to influence an election.” The President then proceeded to defend Murphy’s conduct in the strike. 71

Undeterred, Dies read into the record of the hearings a rebuttal to the President. Roosevelt, he said, was “wholly misinformed” and was relying on “prejudiced sources.” The evidence presented before the Dies Committee would be acceptable in any court, and if Roose-
velt doubted this, the two of them, Dies brazenly suggested, could each appoint an attorney, the two lawyers could then choose a third man, and the three-man committee could study the matter and report to the nation on the accuracy of the testimony. Dies said that it was his duty "to conduct a fearless investigation, regardless of political expediency," and that it would have been wrong for him to have shielded Murphy just because he was a Democrat and a "strong friend" of Roosevelt.\textsuperscript{72}

In a radio address as the day of the election neared, Murphy declared that if the Communists had started the strike, it was certainly without his knowledge. The problem for him had been "not to find out who started the fire but to put it out with as little delay and as little damage as possible."\textsuperscript{73} Murphy lost the election by 93,493 votes, and many party leaders thought that the sit-downs had been a major cause for his defeat.\textsuperscript{74} Murphy himself saw the strikes as a factor in his loss and bitterly wrote in a letter at a later time, "They practically drove me out of Michigan because my beliefs and sympathies supposedly authored the conflicts." In a more sober and probably more nearly correct analysis, however, Murphy attributed his defeat primarily to the recession of 1937–38. Actually, Murphy had run well in Republican Michigan in an off-year election: he had received 47 percent of the vote as compared to 45.8 percent for the Democrats in 1934 and 42 percent in 1930. He had received 51 percent of the vote in 1936, but he had run about 125,000 votes behind Roosevelt in the state.\textsuperscript{75}

The GM strike, as some writers have recognized, was really "more than a strike." It was not only the "most critical labor conflict" of the 1930's and perhaps in all of American history, but it was also a part, the most dramatic and important part, of a vast labor upheaval that Fortune described as "one of the greatest mass movements in our history."\textsuperscript{76} The successful outcome of the strike helped to determine that the decision-making power in large segments of American industry where the voice of labor had been little more than a whisper, if that, would henceforth have to be shared in some measure with the unions in these industries, and the trade-union movement as a whole would enjoy a higher status in American life than it ever had before.

The sit-down strike phase of the labor upheaval of the 1930's, of which the GM strike serves as the best example, was the equivalent in some ways of the civil-rights upheaval that began with the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955–56.\textsuperscript{77} In his analysis of the civil-rights move-
ment, Arthur I. Waskow has coined the phrase "creative disorder" to describe the pursuit of change by disorderly but non-violent means such as sit-ins. Insofar as the politics of disorder seeks change, he has argued, "it is generally invented by people who are 'outside' a particular system of political order, and want to bring change about so that they can enter. In doing so, they tend to use new techniques that make sense to themselves out of their own experience, but that look disorderly to people who are thinking and acting inside the system."

The technique of disorder, Waskow contends, is apt to be tolerated or even encouraged to the extent that the "outside" group using it is pursuing ends deemed legitimate. When the state refuses to use its power against the perpetrators of disorder and prevents the use of violence against them, it in effect legitimizes disorder. In the instance of the civil-rights trespassers, Congress and the Department of Justice, quite apart from any belief in the worthiness of the goals sought by the civil-rights movement, tolerated non-violent disorder because the imposition of order might have led to violence.78

The GM sit-down had many of the characteristics Waskow associates with the concept of creative disorder—the Congress of Racial Equality, as a matter of fact, "apparently derived" the sit-in technique from the sit-down strikes in the automobile industry.79 The sit-down strikers, like the civil-rights trespassers, were seeking change by "disorderly" but non-violent means. They were employing a technique that certainly made "sense" to workers familiar with the technology of automobile production; and, like the civil-rights demonstrators, they were "outsiders" insofar as representation in the automobile industry was concerned and were seeking entry into the "system."

Since the sit-downers were pursuing objectives sanctioned by law but denied them by their employer, their unconventional behavior was tolerated by large sections of the public. Governor Murphy, sympathetic with the goals of the strikers and seeking above all to avoid the outbreak of major violence that might have resulted from a no-nonsense law-and-order approach, refused to employ the power of the state to dislodge the sit-downers and forestalled the use of force against them by others, thus ensuring that some non-violent way out of the struggle would have to be found. Murphy and others apparently assumed that the sit-down strike would some day be accepted among the authorized methods of industrial warfare, just as the outside strike and, to a lesser degree, picketing had gained legitimacy by that time after having previously been considered illegal, but this turned out to be an incorrect judgment.

In other respects, also, the sit-down strike movement of the 1930's, and especially the GM strike, anticipated the civil-rights move-
ment of the 1950's and 1960's. College students involved themselves in both movements, and songs—"We Shall Not Be Moved" was sung in Flint in 1937 and in the South in the early 1960's—were used as a morale builder by both UAW and civil-rights organizers. The UAW-CIO drive for recognition was a challenge to the conservative AFL leadership of the labor movement and brought new labor leaders to the fore nationally and locally—"Leaders are popping up everywhere," Travis said about Flint a month after the GM strike”80—just as the later civil-rights movement was, in some degree, a revolt against the conservatism of the established and dominant Negro organizations and led to the emergence of new leadership elements in local communities and in the nation as a whole. The UAW addressed its appeal to the mass of the semiskilled and unskilled workers in the automobile plants and not just to an elite of the skilled in the same way that the new civil-rights organizations a generation later sought to bestir the mass of the Negroes and not just "the talented tenth" to join in their protests.81

Finally, the GM strike was the beginning of a brief period in the history of the American labor movement when workers saw themselves, or at least were so seen by liberal reformers, as seeking not just to better their own condition but also to better the nation, a moment when group interest and the national interest seemed to merge, when the union was not just another organization but was "a social and moral force."82 In this sense, too, the labor upheaval of the 1930's suggests the civil-rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's at its height.

Although there were obvious dissimilarities, echoes of the sit-down strikes of the 1930's were heard in 1968 and 1969 when college students, conscious of the tactics of civil disobedience practiced by the civil-rights movement for more than a decade, occupied college and university buildings in an effort to wrest concessions from administrative authorities. University administrators, like the public officials confronted with factory sit-downs in the 1930's, like Governor Murphy, had to decide whether to tolerate the trespass upon university property, to secure the abandonment of the tactic by denying food and utility service to the trespassers, to seek court injunctions against the sit-ins, or to eject the offending students by the use of force. Like GM and other companies in the 1930's some university authorities hesitated to employ force to dislodge the strikers lest it result in damage to university property and win support for the sit-downers from those who opposed or were indifferent to their behavior.

The sit-ins at Columbia University and elsewhere were conducted by a minority of militants who by their action sometimes prevented the majority of students from attending classes, just as the GM sit-
downers forestalled the majority of the corporation’s employees from going to their jobs. The student sit-downers, like the factory sit-downers, commonly wished to share in the decision-making that affected their lives, but their cry for “participatory democracy,” “student power,” or “black power” lacked the concreteness of labor’s demand for collective bargaining and union power. Like the automotive sit-downers, student sit-downers were disposed to argue that the ends that they were seeking justified the means that they employed, especially since less disorderly tactics had allegedly proved unavailing; and just as the GM strikers insisted that the corporation withdraw the injunction directed against the trespass upon its property, so the student strikers demanded amnesty for their behavior. The most radical of the student leaders in 1968 and 1969 hoped to “radicalize” the campus just as the far left in the UAW in 1937 desired, in vain, to radicalize the union.

The sit-downers, at least at Columbia University, fashioned a community inside the buildings that they occupied that resembled in some ways the sit-in communities of the GM strikers. Like the visitors to the Flint plants in 1937, a visitor admitted to one of the Columbia buildings in the spring of 1968 was impressed with the discipline that prevailed, the resourcefulness of the students in formulating rules “for living together in an isolated society,” the effort to maintain cleanliness, and the endless round of meetings (more to be expected, no doubt, of students than of automobile workers). The student strikers, it was later reported, derived “feelings of community, drama, meaning” from their experience just as their labor counterparts did in the 1930’s. That the student revolt would lead to the kind of fundamental change in the relationship of students to university administrators and faculty that the sit-down strikes of the 1930’s produced in the relationship between labor and management in the giant factories of the country seemed possible as the academic year 1968–69 drew to a turbulent close.83

The GM sit-down strike of 1936–37 was, all in all, the most significant American labor conflict in the twentieth century. When the UAW victory in the strike was followed by the capitulation of the United States Steel Corporation to the Steel Workers’ Organizing Committee, the Financial Observer remarked that “an era of labor-management relations” had come to an end and “a new era” had begun. “Seldom,” the journal asserted, “does a single happening appear so clearly to draw the line that closes off the reign of old ideas.”84 The comment of the Financial Observer was made with reference to the steel settlement, but it applies with even greater force to the GM sit-down.