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On January 3 two hundred delegates from fifty GM locals in sixteen cities, the UAW international officers, and several CIO representatives gathered in Flint to draft a collective-bargaining agreement that would be submitted to GM and to establish the necessary organizational machinery to conduct the strike. The collective-bargaining terms agreed upon took the form of the aforementioned eight demands that Martin forwarded to GM on January 4. The responsibility of planning for the strike and the power to call additional strikes at GM plants were placed in the hands of a board of strategy consisting of the general officers of the UAW, national representatives of the CIO, and the president of the Flat Glass Workers Union. The delegates also created a variety of other committees, none of which seems to have played a particularly conspicuous role in the strike.¹

Flint, after December 30, was the center of the strike, and here the local leadership, and particularly Bob Travis and Roy Reuther, made the day-to-day decisions regarding the conduct of the strike. They consulted with UAW and CIO representatives, who drifted into and out of Flint, but, as Reuther later said, the decisions were “pretty much ours.”² The headquarters of strike activity in Flint and, to a degree, the social center during the sit-down for the unionists and their families was the rickety, decaying Pengelly Building, smelling of mold and age and altogether unsafe in the event of fire. It was “a regular beehive of activity,” “a teeming place,” and, as one observer noted, “All of striking Flint was there: the strikers, their wives, fathers, daughters.” The strikers outside the plants met daily in the Pengelly, and the numerous strike committees operated out of its rooms. Strikers and their friends dropped in to do some typing, help put out bulletins, attend meetings, arrange for relief, or just for the sake of companionship.³

A network of committees was created in Flint to support the strike in all its aspects: defense (protection), sound cars, picketing, transportation, welfare, kitchen (food), publicity, organization, entertainment, information, education, distribution, car repairs and gas, finances, hall sanitation, speakers bureau, women’s auxiliary, and war veterans. In addition, organizers and staff members were assigned specific responsibilities for each of GM’s plants. As in the inside so on the outside, life for the strike activists became a round of meetings: committee heads met together every morning, the strategy committee
met twice daily, and organizers met every night and were to report hourly to the main office.4

To check on disloyalty in its own ranks and also to engage in undercover work in the camp of the enemy, the Flint UAW created an “investigation department,” “a slick idea” in the view of a La Follette Committee investigator. The strike organization infiltrated the Flint Alliance, placing one of its agents in the Alliance leadership group and receiving daily reports of its activities; it tapped the telephone lines of the National Guard in Flint; and, until the “leak” was discovered, it kept itself informed of opposition activities centering in the Durant Hotel, the city’s best, from information supplied by the chief switchboard operator at the hotel, who was the wife of one of the trolley strikers.5

The women participated in the strike through two organizations, the Women’s Auxiliary and the much publicized Women’s Emergency Brigade. Following a street dance in front of Fisher Body No. 2 on New Year’s eve, about fifty women met in the Pengelly Building and decided to form a Women’s Auxiliary to support their men inside and outside the plants. The Auxiliary set up its own speakers bureau and publicity department, engaged in picketing on a regular basis, staffed a first-aid department in the Pengelly Building, maintained a nursery where wives could leave their youngsters while they themselves engaged in strike duty, collected food and money for the strike, and contacted sit-down “widows” who complained about the absence of their husbands to explain the strike and to enlist their support.6 In the second verse of their theme song, sung to the tune of “Marching through Georgia,” the women referred proudly to their role in the strike:

The women got together and they formed a mighty throng,  
Every worker’s wife and mom and sister will belong,  
They will fight beside the men to help the cause along,  
Shouting the Union forever!7

The initiative in forming the Women’s Emergency Brigade as a unit of the Auxiliary was taken by the twenty-three year old Genora Johnson, a tall, curly-haired, and brown-eyed mother of two and the wife of the Chevrolet No. 4 strike leader, Kermit Johnson. Her participation in the Battle of the Running Bulls convinced her of the need for the “courageous women” to band together to fight beside their men should similar crises develop. Fifty volunteers answered her
call to join the emergency unit, and their number eventually swelled to 350. The Brigade, and how characteristic this was of the strike organizations both inside and outside the plants, was structured along semi-military lines, with Genora serving as commander-in-chief and captains in charge of the various squads. The insignia of the Brigade was a red arm band with white lettering and a red tam. The Brigade was ready for action by January 20, and Genora defiantly declared, "We will form a line around the men, and if the police want to fire then they'll just have to fire into us." The Brigade members, who were to prove that they had the courage of their convictions when the Flint strikers on February 1 seized the Chevrolet No. 4 plant, were not "flaming Joan of Arcs of the labor movement," to use Mary Heaton Vorse's phrasing. "It is just a case," she observed, "of 'Ma' and the girls protecting their husbands and sons."\(^8\)

The Auxiliary and the Emergency Brigade—similar organizations were formed in Detroit, Cleveland, Toledo, and elsewhere—had a "rallying effect" upon the men in the plants. When the women appeared before the occupied plants, the men rushed to the windows and roofs to give them a cheer. But the participation of the women in the strike was probably more important for them than for the men. "I found a common understanding and unselfishness I'd never known in my life," the wife of a Cadillac striker wrote. "I'm living for the first time with a definite goal. . . . Just being a woman isn't enough anymore. I want to be a human being with the right to think for myself."

The union, almost certainly for the first time, became an important element in the lives of many of the female activists. "The union is entering into every aspect of life," declared one strike observer, "the home and the union are being fused." Seeing the relationship between union success and the improvement of the material conditions under which they and their families lived, some of the women concluded that they must henceforth involve themselves actively in union affairs. "A new type of woman was born in the strike," one of the "new women" exulted some weeks after the strike had ended. "Women who only yesterday were horrified at unionism, who felt inferior to the task of organizing, speaking, leading, have, as if overnight, become the spearhead in the battle of unionism."\(^9\)

Another ancillary organization of the Flint strikers was the Union War Veterans of Flint, Post No. 1, made up of union veterans in Local 156. The idea for the group seems to have originated with Henry Kraus and was inspired by the formation of a similar organization during the Goodyear strike. Since some members of the American Legion were openly hostile to the sit-down and were even
rumored to be preparing to march on the plants, the organization of a post of union veterans was at least in part designed to remind the uncommitted that patriotism was not the monopoly of strike opponents. New members of the post swore that they would help to protect the rights of organized labor, be loyal to the UAW, protect the women and children of the community, and “not become a stool pigeon of the Capitalists and give them any information of our order.” The organization, which began to function about the middle of January, provided bodyguards for strike leaders, helped to defend the union sound cars, and sent delegations to the governor in the interests of the union cause.¹⁰

Building up Local 156’s small membership was an important concern of the Flint strike leadership, and this became the responsibility of a special organization committee. The committee dispatched its volunteer workers to the city’s wards and precincts to canvass on a house-to-house basis, and the initial reports were that the campaign was “going good.”¹¹

It was the job of the kitchen or food committee to secure the supplies needed to feed the men sitting down in the Flint plants. Some of the food was purchased, some donated by strike sympathizers, and some “donated” by merchants who were bluntly reminded by union solicitors that they made their living selling to GM workers or who were simply coerced into contributing. The minutes of the Cleveland Fisher Body strike committee of January 25 reported Travis as having said, “Merchants will be run out of Business if they don’t donate.” Norman Bully, on the other hand, remembers going out into the farm areas surrounding Flint and receiving truckloads of potatoes and beef carcasses from sympathetic farmers.¹²

The welfare committee of the Flint UAW was charged with the important task of looking after the relief needs not only of strikers and their families but also of other Flint UAW members made jobless by the spreading effects of the dispute. Had the strike been conducted in an era when public relief assistance was less readily available or in a state whose governor was less committed to the principle of feeding the hungry regardless of the cause of their distress, the UAW might have had put to secure the funds required to sustain the strike, but in the year 1937 and in a state where Frank Murphy was governor public authorities could be expected to shoulder a large part of the burden of strike relief.

If the decision whether to extend relief to strikers had been left entirely to the Genesee County Emergency Relief Commission, it is likely that public assistance would not have been provided for Flint’s strikers. The commission was scheduled to resolve this question at a
January 12 meeting, but well in advance of that date a spokesman for the group talked in terms of disaster if the existing welfare burden were increased since the commission was already running a $43,000 deficit and the city of Flint was without funds to advance for welfare purposes. The compassionate and pro-labor Governor Murphy, however, who as mayor of Detroit had made city welfare funds available to Briggs strikers and who had promised in the 1936 gubernatorial campaign that as governor he would not deny relief to strikers, stated on January 10 that he had advised the State Emergency Relief Administrator, William Haber, that relief was to be provided strictly on the basis of need. "I won't permit the women, children, sick and the old folk to go hungry because of this situation."

Under the circumstances, the union welfare committee saw its major responsibility as assisting the needy Flint UAW members in obtaining public relief, but until a union applicant was placed on the welfare rolls and began to receive public assistance, the UAW stood ready to grant him temporary relief provided that he was engaged in strike duty. UAW relief took the form of a small amount of cash, groceries, and one-quarter ton of coal; by January 25 the union was dispensing an average of $300 a day in this fashion.

Since the Flint UAW had for some time regarded the county relief administrator, Victor S. Woodward, as anti-union and since it complained, as the relief load increased, that the welfare intake staff in Flint was inadequate in numbers and was processing requests too slowly, the governor sent Haber to the city to survey the welfare situation. After a "very satisfactory meeting" on January 16 with the UAW's welfare committee, Woodward, and the county relief commission, Haber advised the governor that matters were "well in hand," that the intake staff was being increased, that complaints were being "amicably adjusted," and that there was, consequently, "no cause for concern." Three days later the State Emergency Welfare Relief Commission specifically ruled that "relief shall be granted to workers striking in industry on the basis of individual need."

There continued to be "much grumbling" in the UAW, however, about welfare and particularly about the slowness with which applicants for relief were processed. Ella Lee Cogwill, the field representative of the State Emergency Welfare Relief Commission, quite properly rejected a UAW request that strikers' families be given a preferential position in relief lines, but despite this a "fine rapport" developed between the Flint UAW welfare committee and the relief organization, and certainly the Flint strikers had no reason to complain as the Cleveland strikers did that "someone is using the relief agency [Cuyahoga County Relief Administration] to break the strike."
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During December, 1936, 8,448 persons in Genesee County received relief under all public programs, but this figure mounted to 28,025 in January and 42,459 in February. Nearly all these persons were Flint residents, which meant that by the close of the strike about one-quarter of the city's population were receiving relief, an all-time record for Flint to that date. The case load, as distinguished from the number of persons receiving relief, stood at 2,960 in December, 1936, and rose to 7,161 in January (as compared to 2,776 in January, 1936) and 11,168 in February (as compared to 2,894 in February, 1936). Of the 8,376 persons, mostly heads of families, who applied for relief between January 1 and February 8, 1937, 6,032 were GM workers. Haber estimated in March that the strike had increased relief costs in Flint by about $400,000, the main burden of which had been carried by the state. Miss Cogwill reported that the attitude of the Flint community was cooperative in the matter of relief, but she did not note that one out-of-town welfare worker who unwittingly made some house calls while wearing a red tam, the head covering of the Emergency Brigade, had doors slammed in her face.

Henry Kraus, who was in a position to know, has stated that the "immediate cost" to the union of the strike in Flint was "considerably under" $50,000, which does not seem unreasonable, although the records are unavailable to corroborate this estimate. Between January 1 and February 9, 1937, two days before the strike was settled, the UAW received $29,106.53 in contributions for its strike fund. Of this sum, locals of the United Rubber Workers, more than reciprocating the UAW support in the Goodyear strike, contributed more than $6,500, and most of the remainder came from UAW locals, notably the Studebaker local, which contributed $600. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers (ACW) voted on February 5 to contribute $25,000 to the UAW, but Martin, fearing that UAW funds might be attached at any moment, asked Sidney Hillman to forward "only a small sum" initially. The ACW dispatched $5,000 to the UAW on February 10, but the money was probably not received by the UAW until the strike was over. That same day, Martin, declaring that "the hour of need is upon us," wired Hillman for as much of the $25,000 as the ACW could spare. It was reported at the close of the strike that the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union had donated $50,000 to the UAW, but, like the ACW contribution, this sum was probably not received before the conclusion of the strike.

The UAW and the strike organization on the outside in Flint were as conscious of the value of publicity as the strike leaders inside the plants were. At the outset of the sit-down the only news organ of the strikers was the Flint Auto Worker, but Kraus's efforts were soon
to be supplemented in a variety of ways. Early in January Len DeCaux, the editor of the CIO’s Union News Service, arrived in Michigan to handle strike publicity for the CIO. At the end of the month Carl Haessler, the managing editor of the Federated Press, a labor news service, came to Flint to take charge of press relations for the UAW. He was soon issuing Local 156 releases to supplement the releases issued by the UAW’s publicity director in Detroit, Frank Winn, another Brookwood Labor College product serving the UAW. Haessler tried to influence the large number of reporters covering the strike in Flint by dispensing news favors to pro-labor reporters and also to newsmen he considered “honest” but not pro-union, like Russell B. Porter of the New York Times.22

About January 20 the Punch Press, a mimeographed strike bulletin addressed particularly to the men inside the plants, made its appearance in Flint. The bulletin, which appeared irregularly thereafter until the end of the strike, was edited by a small group of University of Michigan students, the union’s “‘Baby Brain-trust,’” who had been caught up in the fervor that surrounded the strike and the CIO’s effort to unionize the mass-production industries. The editor of the Punch Press, Ralph Segalman, and his student associates in the venture were concerned about Fascism abroad and injustice at home and, like many college students of the yeasty New Deal years, felt an obligation to become personally involved in the effort to fashion a better social order. They had helped Ann Arbor pinboys in a strike to raise their pitifully low wages, and when the GM strike began they went to Flint to observe the sit-down and possibly to lend a hand. They were persuaded by strike officials of the need for a strike bulletin, and the homely and rather crudely constructed but nevertheless effective Punch Press, which they put together whenever they could get away from Ann Arbor, was the result.23

The UAW made relatively little use of radio in seeking to publicize its cause, although it did arrange for a series of broadcasts on a Windsor, Canada, station. Martin, who had confidently advised the CIO in July that the UAW, “by the use of radio alone, could whip any auto co.,” delivered the first of these addresses on January 19, but Mortimer was prevented from going on the air the next night because his speech, a rather routine presentation of the UAW case, was deemed “too controversial” by the station management, and this episode apparently brought the scheduled series to a premature end.24

The Flint UAW, in an effort to influence middle-class opinion in the city, seems to have played a behind-the-scenes role in instituting a free-speech forum to consider strike issues. The first meeting of the forum, on January 29, was ostensibly arranged by two Ann Arbor
strike sympathizers and was attended, according to the Flint Auto Worker, by some two hundred business and professional men. The principal speaker was Bob Travis, and most of the evening was taken up with a question-and-answer session that followed his talk. A Citizens Committee elected at the meeting to conduct the forum included Eugene Faye, the UAW’s Flint education director, and a Flint public-school teacher sympathetic to the union cause. The UAW also sought to capitalize on the visits to Flint by such well-known personalities as Mrs. Gifford Pinchot and Ellen Wilkinson, a Labor party member of Parliament, both of whom spoke in support of the strike and lambasted GM.

The UAW attempted in its strike publicity both to parry the verbal thrusts of GM and to counterthrust by setting forth the reasons why the union had felt itself compelled to go on strike. It responded to GM’s statements that it was paying the highest wages possible by claiming that company profits per employee had increased from $1.42 in 1932 to $1080 in 1936, about a 760-fold increase, whereas average annual wages in the same period had increased only 15 percent. The high hourly wages at GM, the UAW insisted, were offset by the irregular employment of the company’s workers, but the union tended to rely on out-of-date 1934 figures in making this point. The UAW also liked to contrast the high, $100,000 plus salaries paid some GM officials with the wages received by the company’s blue-collar workers. In the happy GM family, Martin said, “father eats the bacon and mother the gravy, and the kids lick the skillet.”

To GM’s charges of labor dictatorship, the UAW responded that the CIO unions were democratic and that it was the du Pont-Morgan-GM combine that was dictatorial. Where GM complained that outside union agitators were invading its plant cities, the UAW called attention to GM executives and stockholders in far-off places who made decisions affecting the destiny of GM workers in their local communities and who dominated local authorities and institutions. Sloan and Knudsen asserted that the sit-downers were law breakers, but the UAW replied that they were simply exercising “their right as human beings to remain with their jobs” and that it was GM that had “trampled the law of the land under its feet.” GM pointed to the loyalty pledges of its employees to demonstrate the opposition of the majority to the strike, and so the UAW began flooding Governor Murphy with postcards from its supporters that they favored a return to work “only under Union conditions, and under the protection of the United Automobile Workers as our bargaining agency.”

The UAW in its publicity sought to depict GM as the blackguard among the automobile companies by pointing to the favorable rela-
tions that the automobile workers allegedly enjoyed with the other motor-vehicle firms. Martin declared that the UAW had a "fine relationship" with Nash, Studebaker, Graham-Paige, and Willys, all of which, the union claimed, were 100 percent organized; and Chrysler, according to the UAW, was engaging in meaningful collective bargaining with its workers and treating the unionists in its plants fairly. Even Ford, the UAW observed, with some disregard for the truth insofar as Midland was concerned, had been helpful in settling the Midland and Kelsey-Hayes strikes in December, 1936, and the brief Briggs strike that occurred in January.29

The UAW sought to raise the morale of its troops and to create the impression of an army marching to victory by stressing in its publicity the gains in its membership in GM plants and throughout the automobile industry. Martin thus commented on January 16 on the "extraordinary influx" of new members and the long queues of workers at union headquarters waiting to join the UAW, and soon the union was claiming a majority of GM's workers as its members. The UAW was, indeed, making a major effort to increase its membership—by January 21 it had placed one hundred organizers in the field, triple the number of a month earlier—but it was obviously inflating the results for both tactical and public-relations purposes. Initiation fees collected outside of Flint suggest a probable membership increase during January of about fourteen thousand, most of this in Michigan, and per capita tax figures plus initiation fees indicate a probable membership by the end of the month of over seventy thousand for the industry as a whole, which means that the UAW could not possibly have enrolled a majority of the GM employees.30

The UAW did not expect to win the GM strike by the use of words but rather by the mobilization and deployment of such power as was available to it so as to put maximum pressure on the corporation. In conducting the strike in Flint, the strike organization in the city not only utilized the services of Flint auto unionists whose plants were not on strike but who "wanted to be a part of it,"31 but it also was able to augment the strength of the local union forces by drawing on reserves from other cities. Outsiders moved into and out of Flint throughout the strike, but they came to the city especially at moments of great crisis, like after the Battle of the Running Bulls, or when the UAW wished to stage a mass demonstration as a show of force, as in the early days of February.

Auto workers from Detroit and Toledo in particular were frequent visitors in Flint during the strike. After their own plants were evacuated, Cadillac and Fleetwood workers, when needed, left for Flint in every available car; and workers on the night shift at Kelsey-
Hayes would go to Flint in the daytime, and daytime workers would then replace them on the strike front in the evening. The two Toledo locals dispatched members to Michigan whenever called upon to aid. Travis’ Local 12 organized a squad of “Minute Men” to be on call for Flint duty, and after the strike Travis referred to “the hundreds upon hundreds” of Local 12 unionists who had seen strike action in Flint. The rubber workers in Akron, sensitive to their close ties to the auto workers, not only supported the strike with funds but also with manpower. “If them Flint Alliance men rush you,” a Goodyear unionist wrote Martin, “don’t be bashful in asking for rubber workers. We are with you to a man. . . . Don’t back one inch, this is our fight same as yours.”32 Nothing approaching this demonstration of the solidarity of the auto unionists one with the other and of auto workers with rubber workers had ever been seen before in an automobile strike.

Just as motor vehicles brought outsiders to the Flint strike front to reinforce the local troops so the automobile, appropriately enough in this most important of all automobile strikes, became a weapon of war on the battlefield itself. The sound car, “that feared and hated symbol” of the strike for its opponents, had been used in previous automobile strikes, but never before had it played so conspicuous a part in a labor conflict. It was employed in Flint to communicate with workers inside the plants, providing them with news of the strike and even personal messages and thus helping to keep up their morale, and it served as “a mobile field unit” in directing the movement of the strikers and their allies when the occasion demanded. When it appeared at the scene of action, the sound car, like a command post in battle, was guarded by six passenger cars occupied by trusted unionists.33

The Flint strike organization also used the automobile to supplement the conventional picket line, a sensible tactic considering both the nature of the strike and the time of the year. Cars patrolled the plants around the clock to detect any surprise move against the strikers. Strike headquarters also had cars at its disposal so as to be able to move “flying squadrons” to one or another of the plants at a moment’s notice.34

CIO and UAW strategy called for the placing of maximum pressure on GM both by arranging for the settlement of strikes that would otherwise have interfered with the production of GM’s competitors and by the extension of the GM strike to additional company plants. The UAW thus brought the Bohn Aluminum strike to a close on January 20 partly to ensure the uninterrupted flow of pistons to the Ford Motor Company; and in a more important move John L.
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Lewis intervened to arrange a settlement of the Pittsburgh Plate Glass strike on January 20 and the Libby-Owens-Ford strike on January 27\textsuperscript{35} so as to forestall any possible curtailment of Chrysler production. Lewis reportedly arranged the glass settlements with Walter Chrysler, who could not resist "the temporary lure of rather unrestricted profits" at the expense of his GM competitor even though it meant playing the CIO's game. At the end of January the UAW triumphantly called attention to the fact that GM automobile production for the week ending January 30 had totaled 6100 units as compared to 25,950 units for Chrysler and 28,325 for Ford and that for the month as a whole GM had produced less than 60,000 units as compared to a predicted 224,000\textsuperscript{36}.

The most important GM plant to which the UAW extended the strike after January 1, 1937, was Chevrolet No. 4, but before the dramatic seizure of that establishment had occurred, the strike had spread to the Toledo Chevrolet plant, the Janesville, St. Louis, and Oakland Fisher Body and Chevrolet plants, and to Cadillac and Fleetwood in Detroit. The Toledo strike began on January 4 when, on order from "higher authorities," about forty workers stopped production by a sit-down that idled about 860 employees\textsuperscript{37}.

The day after the Toledo strike was initiated the GM strike spread to Janesville, Wisconsin, about twenty-six hundred of whose twenty-five thousand inhabitants worked for Fisher Body and Chevrolet. When the sit-down began in the Fisher Body unit—it was quickly extended to Chevrolet—the plant manager implored the local's president to "trash it out in the office" but was told to "Go to H---.

The plant manager reportedly exclaimed, "My God, My God, They Are All Union." After securing Detroit's approval, the sit-downers, on the first day of the strike, accepted an agreement worked out by the Janesville city manager, Henry Traxler, whereby they consented to the evacuation of the plant that night and GM promised not to resume operations for the duration. On January 14 a nonunion group of workers calling themselves the Alliance opened an office where the "loyal" employees could register their opposition to the strike. The union forced the closing of the office, but the Alliance nevertheless gathered the signatures of about eighteen hundred allegedly satisfied workers. In contrast to what transpired in Flint, both the city manager and the Janesville newspaper preserved an admirable neutrality throughout the strike\textsuperscript{38}.

The GM sit-down moved into Detroit on the morning of January 8 when Walter Reuther, president of the West Side local, called a Cadillac sit-down that affected thirty-eight hundred workers. Four days later about ninety of the more than thirteen hundred workers at
Fleetwood, which made the bodies for Cadillac, sat down at their jobs and forced the plant’s closing. Reuther, in whose West Side domain this plant was also located, announced that the strike had been called to protest GM’s “brutality” at the Battle of the Running Bulls the preceding day. The two plants were evacuated on January 15, but they continued to be picketed. The only incident to mar the otherwise peaceful remainder of the GM strike in Detroit occurred at the Cadillac plant on January 26 when police tangled with pickets who were attempting to prevent company executives and clerical workers from entering the factory because the pickets believed the company was trying to smuggle strikebreakers into the plant in automobiles. The next morning a picket line of at least one thousand persons that included Dodge, Kelsey-Hayes, and other Detroit unionists shut off entry into the plant’s administration building. The union removed the picket line from the building two days later but was prepared “to clamp down completely” should the company attempt to bring strikebreakers into the plant.39

On January 13, after the UAW had failed two days previously to stage a sit-down in the Pontiac Motor Company plant,40 the St. Louis Fisher Body and Chevrolet plant was closed by a conventional strike that idled about thirty-seven hundred workers. Delmond Garst, the executive secretary of the small St. Louis local, reported that the response of the workers had been “wonderful” and that the Kansas City local and the CIO had given “fine support.” “We feel jubilant about the whole matter,” he wrote.41 Two weeks later the Oakland, California, Fisher Body and Chevrolet plant, employing about two thousand workers, also became a strike victim, according to the UAW, but GM was to insist otherwise and was able to have the factory excluded from the list of struck plants to which the settlement that ended the strike applied.42 The strike itself, coupled with the shortage of key parts as the result of the dispute, had, by the time of the Oakland shutdown, forced the closing of fifty GM plants and the idling of more than 125,000 GM workers. The Chevrolet No. 4 plant was the only GM unit to be struck after the closing of the Oakland plant, but in a symbolic gesture directed against GM as a whole, UAW unionists from Tarrytown, New York, joined by workers from the needle trades, picketed the GM Building in New York on February 1; and one hundred Detroit UAW members, supported by fifty women and a dozen children and urged on by a sound truck, demonstrated in front of the GM Building in Detroit on February 6.43

Of the strikes initiated against GM plants outside Michigan before January 1 only the Guide Lamp dispute attracted much national attention once Flint became the center of strike concern. The
first of the strike fronts, Atlanta, reported to Travis on January 12 that “we are still holding down the fort, everything is running smooth down here. The main trouble is no money and no new’s [sic].” In Kansas City, where snow and cold became a problem for the strikers, the UAW maintained a heavy picket line in front of the struck plant in the morning but only a small patrol the remainder of the day. The local forced the shutdown of the parts plant on January 18 because it was allegedly supplying GM units that were still open, and two days later pickets stopped superintendents, foremen, and office help from entering the main plant. “At present,” the executive board of the local reported on February 1, “everything is under control and the moral [sic] is exceptionally high considering the length of time we have been out and the severe weather, also the distance that separates us from the real strike center.”

In Cleveland, the UAW, after ending its sit-down, undertook the systematic picketing of the Fisher Body plant. On the whole, the Cleveland strikers conducted themselves “nicely,” to quote the city’s chief of police, but on January 4 police scuffled with pickets when they refused to allow the plant manager to enter the factory. The union attributed the action of the pickets to error and voted to allow the plant manager, the maintenance crew, watchmen, doctors, and nurses to enter the plant without molestation. The minutes of the strikers’ meetings reveal a concern about the “acute” relief problem, but they attest at the same time to a growing union membership.

In Norwood, the “loyal” Employee’s Bargaining Committee called for a return to work and alleged that the local workers were on strike not because of any grievances but simply because the international had ordered the action. The “ring leader” of the anti-union forces was William H. Black, the first president of the UAW local and the brother of the distinguished agricultural economist, John D. Black. Black charged that “outside elements” had gained control of the local, and he protested to Senator La Follette that Norwood unionists were beating up their opponents, picketing and damaging their homes, and coercing them to join the union and that they had instituted a “near reign of terror” in the city.

Of the strikes outside Flint none led to more turmoil than the Guide Lamp dispute in Anderson, Indiana. A city of about forty thousand population, almost all of whom were native-born whites, Anderson was strictly a GM town. Of its approximately fourteen thousand wage earners in 1937, about three thousand were employed in the Guide Lamp Division, which manufactured headlights and other automotive lighting equipment, and about eight thousand worked in the Delco-Remy Division, whose five Anderson plants
produced distributors, generators, and other electrical equipment. As a GM public-relations report indicated, the corporation enjoyed “high public standing” in Anderson: nearly everyone knew the extent to which GM contributed to the city’s employment, and the corporation’s relations with the city’s newspapers, public authorities, and civic leaders were “intimately friendly.” “. . . this gigantic corporation,” Charles B. Salyer, a local attorney aiding the UAW declared, “is the government, is the voice of the people, and the voice of the people is the voice desired to be spoken by the General Motors.” A strike affecting the employer upon whom the city was so dependent for its well-being was bound to have serious local repercussions.

The alarm caused in Anderson by the strike at Guide Lamp beginning on December 31 was heightened when Delco-Remy did not reopen following the New Year holiday because of a cancellation of orders, although it was widely believed in Anderson that fear of a strike was the real cause. With “industrial paralysis” spreading in Anderson, back-to-work movements were soon initiated by nonunionists in both plants. The UAW charged that foremen and group leaders were visiting workers in their homes to secure signatures for loyalty petitions, while the Anderson police chief, Joseph Carney, accused the union of coercing nonunion workers. Although press accounts of what had transpired were exaggerated, a few Guide Lamp strikers, until ordered to desist by the Indiana State Police, halted and impounded several trucks carrying GM products to and from Anderson.

On January 8 three hundred Anderson businessmen assembled to form the Citizens League for Industrial Security and elected Homer Lambert, a local real-estate operator, as its chairman. The stated objectives of the League were to encourage industry by promoting harmony between labor and management, to foster obedience to the law and to oppose mob violence, and to promote “steady and uninterrupted employment” in the city at fair wages. The League urged Anderson’s GM workers to reject “alien leadership” and the advice of “strangers from far away places” and asked townspeople to indicate their support for the majority who wished to work by joining the new organization, which more than seventeen thousand of them did. The union saw the League as a “thinly disguised strike-breaking organization,” and Salyer charged that all sorts of pressure had been applied by local businessmen and officials to secure members. The kind of fervor being whipped up against outsiders was manifested in a letter sent to Hugh Thompson, the veteran UAW organizer in charge of the union campaign in the city, advising him and his “organization” “to
get out of Anderson, and do it now, while getting is safe. We don't need your trash in Anderson.”

The abandonment of the sit-down strike at Guide Lamp on January 16 was followed two days later by the reopening of Delco-Remy. The management now augmented the normal force of fifty-seven uniformed plant police in Delco-Remy by one hundred “special duty guards” armed with blackjacks. The new guards, some of whom were leaders of the back-to-work movement, patrolled the plant for the next three weeks. Tension mounted in the city and finally erupted into violence on the night of January 25, described by the regional director of the NLRB as “the most violent night ever experienced in Anderson.” The UAW was scheduled to hold a public meeting in the local courthouse that night, but preceding the meeting loyal employees assembled at a local theater, some of them having been urged to attend by Delco-Remy foremen. Amidst “much disorder and drinking,” to quote an NLRB source, the men armed themselves with clubs by breaking up the furniture and then divided into two groups, one proceeding to the courthouse and the other to the UAW's headquarters. Warned of impending trouble, the union had cancelled its meeting, but some unionists were still in the vicinity of the courthouse, and three of them were badly beaten by a group that included GM foremen and group leaders.

The attackers then moved on to the union headquarters to join the rest of the mob, and the combined force of about one thousand, which included Delco-Remy and Guide Lamp supervisory personnel, laid siege to the building. An outside staircase led to the union office where Thompson, seven other men, six women, and a four-year-old child awaited an expected attack. The unionists stood off their besiegers with a 22-caliber pistol and some billiard balls while Thompson sought frantically to summon the National Guard, the state police, and city police. During the course of the next three hours eleven policemen and deputy sheriffs arrived and escorted the union group to the county jail, from where Thompson left for Detroit.

The mob in the meantime had completely ransacked the union office and destroyed the local's records and had then moved on to the Guide Lamp plant, where it drove off the union pickets and demolished a picket shack that had been placed on private property. F. L. Burke, the Guide Lamp plant manager, then emerged from the factory and, according to several affidavits, thanked the loyal employees for their good deeds that night, told them that they had destroyed the union, and stated that work would be resumed at Guide Lamp in two or three days.
GM officials made no effort at any point to restrain the mob, nor were any of the special guards who had served as leaders of the vigilantes relieved of their duties. The chief of police, who was accused by the NLRB regional director of having permitted the mob “to run wild,” explained that he had not made any arrests because this would have precipitated still greater violence. The notation on the police blotter for this night of violence was “‘nothing to report.’” Salyer thought that the events of January 25 provided proof of GM’s control over Anderson’s public officials. “The police and officials,” he wrote, “have done everything within their power to break the Union, drive it out of Anderson and play ball with General Motors.”

Victor Reuther arrived in Anderson at about 4:00 A.M. on January 26 to replace Thompson. He found, as he later recalled, that many of the union officials had gone into hiding; and because of the fear that prevailed it was necessary for him to hold his first meeting in Alexandria, twelve miles north of Anderson. Reuther was unable at the outset to rent a hotel room since hotel operators were afraid that his presence would lead to an attack on their property. He lived with friends in Anderson, moving night after night to conceal his whereabouts.

Following the events of January 25 unionists in Delco-Remy were subjected to “wholesale intimidation” by the loyal employees and the special guards. Union members were approached in the plant by loyal employees, ordered to leave the factory, and told that they could not return to work unless they first destroyed their union cards and presented affidavits of resignation from the union; ninety-one employees were actually ejected from the plant. The NLRB, which held Delco-Remy “to a large degree responsible for the formation and growth of this allegedly overpowering employee revolt,” found that company officials had urged loyal workers to evict unionists and had personally evicted some of them, had not penalized the assailants in any way, and had not made deductions from their pay for time spent away from their jobs intimidating unionists. They had, by contrast, shown hostility to those who had been driven from their jobs and had not compensated them for the time that they had been forcibly kept from the plant. The NLRB rejected as “incredible” the company’s contention that it had not known that weapons were being carried in the plant and dismissed as contrary to fact its statements that it had attempted to calm the situation.

On January 27, after Thompson had brought news to Detroit about events in Anderson, Ed Hall, attorney Maurice Sugar, three additional unionists, and two armed bodyguards left by train for Anderson to reestablish the union’s headquarters there. Hall stated,
ironically in view of GM’s protestations about union trespass upon its property, that his purpose in going to Anderson was “to get back the property that belongs to the union.” He was awakened on the train between Union City and Winchester, and an Anderson unionist was brought to him to advise him not to go on to Anderson since “gangsters and vigilantes” were waiting for the train there and were guarding all roads leading to the city. Hall was told to get off the train at Muncie, where four unionists would meet him and drive him to Alexandria.

Heeding the advice given them, the union party left the train at Muncie, where they found “many shady looking characters” loitering about the station. One of the loiterers told Hall that the four unionists who were to meet him had been arrested and that he was not to go to Anderson. Hall called Governor M. Clifford Townsend and the sheriff of the county to request protection but was promised none, and the local police refused to escort the union group to Alexandria, where Hall allegedly intended to mobilize twelve hundred unionized steel rock workers for a march on Anderson. After breakfasting in the train station, Hall again called the governor and arranged to meet him in Indianapolis. The police then escorted the union party to Newcastle, from where they left by interurban for the state capital, thus avoiding Anderson. Hall and Sugar asked Townsend the next day to deputize one hundred Anderson unionists to offset the force previously deputized by city officials.59

In Anderson, in the meantime, hundreds of Delco-Remy employees, armed with clubs and iron bars, had been permitted to leave their jobs on the morning of January 28 to meet the Hall party at the Anderson railroad station. There were no police in sight at the terminal, but GM supervisory personnel, some of whom had apparently helped to organize the group, were present. None of the employees had his pay docked for the hour or so spent away from the plant, nor were any of them disciplined.60 The mayor of Anderson, Harry Baldwin, announced the next day that if Hall did reach Anderson, he would be arrested and returned to Detroit—UAW organizer James Roland had been arrested the day before only a few hours after his arrival in the city and forced to leave Anderson—and that he was having Reuther watched and had prevented him from making a radio address the previous night. Reuther had intended to say that Anderson was being “ruled by mob action” and that hundreds of armed men were roaming the streets, destroying property, and endangering human life but that the police were “unwilling or unable” to stop them. He had planned to urge that Anderson be “re-annex[ed]” to the United States.61
On January 30, by which time the Department of Labor, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the La Follette Committee, and the Indiana attorney general all had investigators in Anderson, the UAW was permitted to reopen its headquarters and, according to the mayor, was promised police protection provided that no out-of-town organizers were brought into the city and no attempt was made to inflame local anti-union sentiment. The UAW wanted the National Guard sent into the city, but since the entire Indiana Guard was at that time deployed in seventeen Indiana counties that had been ravaged by floods, Governor Townsend could not comply with this request. He did, however, arrange for the appointment of seventy-five additional deputies, and Mayor Baldwin agreed to select the men from a list acceptable to the union and to drop some of the anti-union men already deputized. Picketing was then resumed at the Guide Lamp plant. The unionists returned to the factory in a caravan of old jalopies, the lead car flying the Stars and Stripes, circled the plant, and then parked their cars and reestablished the line. Victor Reuther recalls that some of the deputies on the scene, “big burly plug-uglies,” sought in vain to provoke violence as picketing was resumed. All was not to be peaceful on the line, however. On February 3 police congregated at the plant, and a police captain struck Reuther on the face. Carney some time later confiscated the local’s sound truck, and he ignored a court order to release the vehicle. The union obtained another truck in Alexandria, but the Anderson city council then forbade the use of sound equipment on the city’s streets.62

On February 6 the Anderson unionists evidenced their “grim determination” by staging a parade with six hundred men in line.63 Anderson was thereafter to be relatively peaceful until the end of the strike brought a new outburst of violence and persuaded Governor Townsend to send the National Guard into the city and to declare martial law. What happened in Anderson pointed up the dangers inherent in a community where public officials and a single employer were so closely linked, where so many citizens understandably related their own well-being to the well-being of that employer and the continued operation of his business, and where the only opposition force was a small union that enjoyed very little public support. The Anderson story also reveals that however sincere Knudsen was in saying that GM wanted the strike settled without violence, corporation plant managers and supervisory personnel, under circumstances favorable to the company, were willing to sanction the use of force and the tactics of intimidation to break the strike and to defeat the union.

In the strategy and tactics that it pursued in the GM strike, the
UAW, to a degree, modeled itself after GM, although it was not always simply reacting to the initiatives of the corporation. GM engaged in labor practices proscribed by the NLRA, but the UAW defied the law of trespass. Both GM and the union were guilty of spying on one another. GM attempts to stimulate back-to-work movements were countered by UAW efforts to spread the strike. GM asked its employees to sign petitions indicating their desire to return to or remain at work under existing conditions, and so the UAW had its members advise Murphy that they wished to return to work only under union conditions. Some GM employees were coerced into signing loyalty pledges and Flint Alliance membership cards, but the union also resorted to coercion both inside and outside the plants. What happens in so many social conflicts happened to some extent in the GM sit-down strike: "One defeats the enemy," David Riesman has written, "by becoming more like him."64

The UAW did not wage its struggle against GM without important allies. The CIO, liberal-reform groups, radicals of various hues and shadings, and government officials came to the union's assistance, sometimes in a crucial way. Recognizing the importance of the battle to the entire campaign of the CIO in the mass-production industries, Lewis made it clear from the very beginning of the strike that the new organization was "squarely behind" the UAW. When CIO and UAW leaders met in an emergency session in Detroit in the middle of January, one CIO leader remarked, "The C.I.O. is in this thing up to its neck," and its unions "will not stop to count their nickels and dimes." Before the strike began there was ambivalence in the GEB and particularly on the part of Martin regarding CIO aid, but once the strike was underway the UAW wanted "more, not less" CIO assistance.65 The CIO provided the UAW with money, experienced organizers like Adolph Germer, John Brophy, Powers Hapgood, Rose Pesotta, and Leo Krzycki, and, in the final negotiations that led to the conclusion of the strike, the formidable presence and skill as a bargainer of John L. Lewis himself.

It is easy, however, to overestimate the contribution made by the CIO to the UAW triumph, important as that contribution was. It is not true, for example, as alleged, that Lewis directed "every important step" of the strike, although his assistance toward the end of the dispute was crucial. The extent of the CIO financial aid can also be exaggerated. Powers Hapgood told a Flint mass meeting on January 24 that the United Mine Workers was assessing its 625,000 members $1 per month to aid the UAW, but the assessment was actually designed to build up the financial reserves of the mine union, and it is not clear how much, if any, of this money reached the UAW. The
contributions of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union do not seem to have reached the UAW until the strike was over, whereas the earlier contributions by UAW locals and the United Rubber Workers presumably would have been made had there been no CIO. Brophy and Germer were the CIO officials charged with the greatest responsibilities in the strike until Lewis entered the final negotiations, and they certainly brought far greater experience to the affair than the youthful UAW strike leaders did, but Travis thought both men too cautious and actually worked more closely with UAW officials on the scene and the militant Powers Hapgood than with the two senior CIO representatives.66

In a decade when the right of workers to organize free from employer interference came to be recognized as an important civil liberty,67 it is not surprising that civil-liberties groups came to the UAW’s support. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) did not accept the right to engage in a sit-down strike as a civil liberty,68 nor did it deny the propriety of the injunction process as a means of dealing with the GM sit-down, but it nevertheless protested the sweeping terms of the Black and later the Gadola injunction and the restrictions that they imposed on peaceful picketing and other union activities, and it supported Murphy’s refusal to eject the strikers by force. At the request of a UAW attorney, the ACLU protested to Governor Townsend the “lawless rule” in Anderson and urged him to deputize men “capable of fair police administration”; and in response to the appeal of Victor Reuther and UAW international officers the affiliated Chicago Civil Liberties Committee sent its executive secretary to Anderson at the end of the strike to investigate alleged violations of civil liberties in that community. The committee eventually issued a report that was severely critical of GM’s behavior in Anderson. The ACLU also secured the consent of such prominent citizens as Archibald MacLeish, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Alexander Meiklejohn to serve on a National Citizens Committee for Civil Rights in the Automobile Industry, which aligned itself with the UAW in its struggle against GM.69

The ACLU efforts were supplemented and complemented by the left-leaning Conference for the Protection of Civil Rights, a Michigan organization established in 1935 that claimed the affiliation of 311 labor, farm, cultural, and civic groups. The Conference offered its aid to the UAW the day after the Black injunction was issued, and from that time forward, often in collaboration with the National Citizens Committee, which it had helped to establish, it attempted “to focus almost immediate attention on menaced liberties” and to sway public
opinion in the strikers’ favor. It sent groups of ministers to Flint as observers and bombarded public officials in Michigan and elsewhere with telegrams and resolutions demanding the impeachment of Judge Black, calling for the investigation of the relationship between GM and the governments of Flint and Genesee County, and, above all, protesting the use of violence and the threat of vigilante action in Flint, Saginaw, and Anderson.70 The Fisher Body No. 1 strike committee, on January 22, duly noted the assistance being rendered the strikers by the Conference, and after the strike Local 156 expressed its appreciation to the organization for its “vigilant support” of civil rights in Flint.71

Clergymen of a liberal-reformist point of view also spoke out for the UAW. Early in the strike Monsignor John A. Ryan, the director of the Social Action Department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the Reverend James Myers of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ, and Rabbi Barnett Brickner, the chairman of the Social Justice Commission of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, jointly urged the settlement of the strike in accordance with the principle of exclusive representation, which GM staunchly opposed and the UAW supported. Myers, a Presbyterian minister who had joined the council staff in the 1920's and had “carried the social gospel to factory towns, coal fields, textile villages, and cotton plantations,” visited Flint for several days in January and then issued a report on the strike, contained in the Council’s Information Service that was distinctly partial to the union cause. Travis expressed his “admiration” of the report and requested several hundred copies for distribution in Flint, “especially among citizens who have an open mind.”72

In Michigan, the Michigan Christian Advocate, the journal of the Methodist Episcopal church, dealt with the dispute in terms sympathetic to the strikers. John E. Marvin, the associate editor, visited the No. 1 plant in January with two other clergymen and then reported in the Advocate that the strikers were men of an “unusually high type” and that he was impressed by their loyalty to a cause that they believed just. Of the dinner he was served in the plant, he wrote, “we ate as though we were at a church pot-luck.”73

A group of students from the University of Michigan, identifying with the movement to organize the unorganized much as college students thirty years later would identify with the civil-rights movement, came to Flint to aid the strikers. Not only did they edit the Punch Press, as already noted, but they took their turn in the welfare office, performed leg work for the strike organization, and aided in the union’s educational effort in the occupied plants.74
Socialists, Communists, and far-left sympathizers, although generally aware that the strikers were without revolutionary intent, saw the strike nevertheless as a somewhat sharper challenge to property rights than the ordinary strike was and, in any event, as of critical importance to the entire struggle to organize the mass-production industries and consequently deserving of their whole-hearted support. Norman Thomas thus wrote Martin shortly after the strike began wishing him “all possible success in a great cause” and indicating that the Socialist party “will do what it can” to aid; and the party’s Labor and Organization Secretary reported that Socialists and other “working class and progressive forces” were supporting the strike directly and through the Conference for the Protection of Civil Rights. The Central Committee of the Communist party called on its members “to rally wholeheartedly and at once to the aid of the strikers.” Communist-controlled organizations responded by contributing to the UAW’s strike fund and by aiding in the collection of food and money for the strike, and the Daily Worker gave the dispute extensive coverage and featured several special auto strike sections.75

More important than the role in the strike of the Socialist and Communist parties qua parties was the part played by individual radicals within the UAW and the CIO. That there was a sprinkling of left wingers within the UAW at the time of the strike is not at all surprising. In the difficult early days of auto unionism, the substantial risks involved in organizational work were apt to discourage those who did not bring to their task some ideological commitment and a conviction that trade unionism was a means by which large social objectives might be attained. It was frequently also these same radicals who alone had the experience and organizational skills required to build and sustain the new unions, and in the absence of an established leadership group in the UAW some of them were able to gain positions of influence. It did not, of course, harm the cause of the radicals and particularly of the Communists, who had been so vocal about the matter, that the UAW as an organization had decided that they had been “right” on the vital issues of industrial unionism, the early establishment of an international union, and the need for greater democracy in the union and that Dillon and the AFL leadership had been “wrong.” Finally, the fact that the strike and the beginnings of the UAW as an international union coincided with the Popular Front period discouraged the kind of critical thinking about Communist goals in the labor movement that was later to come. In the era of the Popular Front liberals looked upon Communists as good trade unionists and were disposed to attack “red-baiting” as playing the employer’s game.76
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The attention given to Communist participation in the sit-down has tended to obscure the very substantial part played in the dispute by Socialists in both the CIO and the UAW. When Homer Martin's secretary, Julia Loewe, wrote Norman Thomas during the strike about the "good work" being accomplished by "our comrades," she was not indulging in flights of fancy. Germer and Hapgood of the CIO; William Carney and B. J. Widick of the Rubber Workers, both of whom helped out in Flint during the strike; Victor, Walter, and Roy Reuther; Genora and Kermit Johnson; Joe Ditzel; Larry Davidow, the UAW's principal attorney at the beginning of the strike; Merlin Bishop; and Phil Wise, who became Pete Kennedy's aide in the No. 1 plant, were all Socialists, and their contribution to the final victory was large.77

Because of the clandestine nature of American Communism, the different levels upon which the Communist party has operated, and the problem of distinguishing among bona fide Communists, fellow travelers, and non-Communists who supported Communist policies, it is no easy task to determine the precise role played in the strike by the Communists and their allies and friends. That the role was important has been steadily asserted by both the left and the right. William Weinstone declared shortly after the strike had ended that there was "no doubt that where the Communists were active and took an outstanding part, ... there the strike was strongest, and this made for the success of the whole battle." During the Dies Committee hearings in the fall of 1938 witness after witness asserted that the Communists were behind the entire sit-down strike movement, and Martin Dies himself stated that "well-known Communists instigated and engineered the sit-down strike."

More recently two of the participants in the strike have made similar evaluations. Larry Davidow, who moved considerably to the right following the sit-down era, stated in an interview in 1960 that "the major fact to keep in mind is that the whole strategy of the sit-down strike was communist inspired, communist directed and communist controlled." And Wyndham Mortimer, who was certainly in a position to know, declared in 1964 that, although quite a number of the people who were prominent in the strike were not Communists, "the main strategy of the sitdown strike itself was conducted by the Communists. ... I think the Communists had a lot to do with running the strike."78

Mortimer himself, of course, had begun the reorganization of the union in Flint in 1936 and had been involved in the decision to strike the No. 1 plant. As a UAW vice-president he was a member of the strike strategy committee, and he was one of the three principal
negotiators for the union with the company. Bob Travis, accurately described as "the leading personality... in the strike" in Flint, later became associated with several front organizations and was active in the Farm Equipment Workers Union, described by Max Kampelman as having been "completely within the Communist orbit." It is difficult, however, to know precisely what Travis' commitments were in January, 1937, but Roy Reuther, who was closely associated with him during the strike, believed that Travis at that time was "a good dedicated trade union guy" and was not "political" and that only after the strike did he gravitate to the left. Travis, by his own admission however, was very much influenced by Mortimer—Carl Haessler has characterized Travis as "Mortimer's man in the union at the time"—and it has been reported that he received advice from Weinstone, among others, during the strike. At the level of the strike leadership in the plants, Bud Simons and some of his cohorts in Fisher No. 1 had been members of what Earl Browder called "the Red Auto Workers Union," and Simons, as we have seen, had participated in the Communist-infiltrated rump movement to promote the formation of an auto international.

Lee Pressman, the CIO's general counsel, a close associate of Lewis throughout the strike, and one of the signers of the final settlement, admitted in 1959 that he had been a member of the Communist Ware group in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. He testified that he had broken organizationally with the Communist party in 1936, but he did not sever his ideological connections with Communism until more than a decade later. Maurice Sugar, one of the UAW's attorneys during the strike, had been identified with such front groups as the International Labor Defense, the Friends of the Soviet Union, and the John Reed Clubs. In 1939 he had criminal libel charges brought in the Detroit Recorder's Court against an auto worker who had distributed a leaflet that accused Sugar, among other things, of being a Communist, but the worker was acquitted by the jury.

Like Pressman, Charles Kramer, the La Follette Committee's chief investigator in Detroit at the beginning of the sit-down and a Travis and UAW ally, was, as we have seen, identified as a member of the Ware group, and he later refused to answer questions of a Congressional committee concerning his alleged Communist affiliations. It was undoubtedly because of his suspicions concerning Kramer's politics that Germer asked La Follette on January 11 to send in a replacement for Kramer, a request with which the Senator complied.

Although Communists, fellow travelers, and non-Communists
who sympathized with Communism were prominently involved in the sit-down, it would be a mistake to interpret the strike as a Communist plot or to assume that the Communists and their friends pursued policies that conflicted importantly with the organizational interests of the UAW. The workers struck because of their grievances against management—the strike “emanated from the conditions,” to quote Roy Reuther—rather than from any desire to promote Communist objectives, and the Communists do not appear to have made any serious effort to politicize the dispute. Arthur M. Ross has distinguished between the “agitational” and “organizational” motives of the Communists in a strike, between the use of the strike as a weapon of propaganda to sharpen class lines and its use in building a strong union. The GM strike undoubtedly strengthened the position of the Communists and their allies within the UAW, but their principal contribution was in helping to develop a powerful union that would eventually drive the Stalinists from its ranks rather than in imbuing the strikers with revolutionary fervor or converting them to Communism.84

Finally, and enormously important in determining the outcome of the strike, was the assistance rendered the UAW during the sit-down by federal and state officials. The UAW failed to persuade the Michigan legislature to investigate a long list of union complaints about the behavior of GM, and it did not seek to invoke the assistance of the NLRB to buttress its demand for exclusive representation,85 but it did receive significant support from the La Follette Committee and from the governor of Michigan.

Throughout the strike the La Follette Committee investigators who had been instructed to observe strike developments were, like the committee’s staff men who had been investigating GM before the strike, allies in effect of the UAW rather than neutral observers seeking objectively to ascertain the facts. Kramer, Harold Cranefield, and H. D. Cullen were all sympathetic to the union cause and worked closely with strike officials in Flint. “The explosion is coming sure as God made little green apples,” Cullen wrote from Flint on January 21, “unless those damn fools of GM get busy and give up! ! ! !” He thought that “the biggest thing” the committee could do during the year “would be to drive this GM thing out into the open and thus create a public sentiment that would FORCE the right action. A complete back-down by GM would not only be best, from our standpoint, but for the whole damn country as well—.” Kramer, when he learned that the Flint strikers had seized the Chevrolet No. 4 plant, wrote Travis, “You guys seem to be the only ones who are really doing a job.”86
La Follette Committee investigators in Flint gathered affidavits from workers who claimed that they had been coerced into signing loyalty pledges or Flint Alliance membership cards; they collaborated with the union in seeking to uncover anti-union espionage (Cullen thought that the discovery of "a few more spies" in Flint would be "a lot of help"), in the development of its own "intelligence" network and in checking out stories whose revelation might prove harmful to GM; and they "prepared" union witnesses to testify before the committee in Washington. On January 25 Cullen served subpoenas on Boysen, Wills, Wolcott, and Genesee County prosecutor Joseph R. Joseph to appear before the committee with records relating to the purchase of gas and gas bombs and other matters pertinent to the January 11 Fisher Body No. 2 riot. Cullen thought that the public revelation of the subpoenaing of Boysen had helped to deflate the importance of the Flint Alliance. Cranefield gathered fifty strikers together for a mass interview on the No. 2 riot, and Cullen tried to establish "a definite connection" between GM and the battle.

In Washington La Follette Committee hearings in late January revealed GM to have been the second best customer of the Corporations Auxiliary Company, and hearings that began on February 8 exposed the more important links between GM and Pinkerton and further embarrassed the corporation. Cullen had advised the earliest possible GM hearings because he thought that the introduction of "evidence of duplicity" on the corporation's part regarding its assertions concerning the loyalty of its employees would "carry more than ordinary weight and swing sentiment."87

During one of the strikers' demonstrations in Flint a union spokesman told his audience that Governor Murphy would "take care" of them,88 and in a sense the governor did just that. His decision regarding relief for strikers and their families was a boon to the union, and his position with respect to the use of force in the strike and the necessity of settling the dispute by negotiation was the single most important factor in bringing the strike to a conclusion that was not unfavorable to the union.

The company and the union, appreciating the influence that public opinion might have in determining the outcome of the strike, sought to communicate their version of events and of the issues at stake to the Flint community and to the larger community outside of that city. Flint, so heavily dependent on GM employment, was dealt a severe economic blow by the strike; a "dark cloud of economic fear" hovered
over the city throughout the dispute. By January 20 thirty-eight thousand of GM's forty-three thousand hourly workers in Flint were on strike or laid off because of the strike. As compared to January, 1936, new car registrations in Flint dropped 62.6 percent in January, 1937, retail sales 23.6 percent, outbound car loadings 75.1 percent, and water consumption 11.4 percent. Sears Roebuck reported a 75 percent decline in sales as compared to December, and even the sales of foodstuffs and milk were reported to have dropped. On the other hand, building permits increased 3.5 percent, bank clearings 19.4 percent, and postal receipts 23.6 percent, workers paid their bills promptly, and the hotel business boomed as newsmen, photographers, newsreel personnel, and radio crews flocked to the city. Economic conditions in Flint almost certainly would have been worse than they actually were had not $6 million in additional funds been distributed in the city in December as the result of bonus payments by GM and other companies, payments to the depositors of three banks that had closed during the bank holiday, and Christmas fund checks.\textsuperscript{89}

The strike, as one Flint citizen noted, "came very close and was very real to us in Flint." Observers sensed the tension in the air, and as the strike continued there was apprehension that the antagonism engendered by the conflict would at any moment erupt into violence. In his strike novelette Paul Gallico described Flint as "all tightened up with nerves—jumpy, jittery, waiting for something." A La Follette Committee investigator wrote from Flint on January 21 that "this place is a powderkeg—and these birds are throwing lit matches all around. I mean both sides." Early in the next month another La Follette staff member reported the town "aflame," and on February 9 a National Guard intelligence estimate referred to "an increased tenseness about the city." Roy Reuther recalled having been threatened so many times that he stationed an armed man outside his room and kept a bodyguard inside the room when he slept. In view of the prevailing atmosphere in Flint, Reuther thought it was "miraculous" that no one had been killed.\textsuperscript{90}

Automotive Industries reported that correspondents in Flint found it to be "an anti-strike community," but one of the union participants later insisted, "There wasn't one reaction. There wasn't a united community. There were many communities." Flint, indeed, did not express a single reaction to the strike, but it is evident that the company enjoyed more influential and, almost certainly, far more numerous support than the union did. As the strike dragged on, it appears that there was "a trend of sympathy away from the sit-downers" even among some of their former supporters. "The people of Flint," a National Guard source reported late in the strike, "are
coming to feel that the majority are suffering economic and social distress at the hands of the minority.”

The power structure of the community, its officials, the board of education, the city newspaper, and the more influential business and professional people were pro-GM. Of the city’s officeholders, Barringer was the most opposed to the UAW and its goals. He had tangled with the union during the early days of the trolley strike and had sought to drive the sound car from the streets, and the UAW now suspected him of plotting its very destruction. Barringer later blamed the strike on the Communists, and he bitterly resented the role played in the dispute by Murphy, the National Guard, and the La Follette Committee. “Jittery” about the sit-down, which he later characterized as “something new to us, and ... something that we were confused to know how to handle,” he sought to involve the State Police in the dispute as early as January 5, and at a critical moment in the strike he began raising a force of vigilantes to combat the union in a provocative action that could have led to widespread violence. Mayor Bradshaw was nominally Barringer’s superior, but the city manager had the greater influence in the city’s government, and as safety director he controlled the city’s police. He did, however, have his enemies on the city commission, some of whose members were not as hostile to the UAW as he was, and in the end he lost the backing of the commission’s majority.

The city’s police force, headed by James V. Wills, who was no friend of the strikers, became involved on at least two occasions in provocative acts that raise questions about the quality of its leadership and its neutrality in the strike: a show of force on the evening of January 7 following the destruction of the union’s sound equipment across the street from the Chevrolet complex and the attack on Fisher No. 2 on January 11. The police arrested two unionists as the result of the January 7 fighting and held them incommunicado during the remainder of the day. At a union meeting at the Pengelly Building that evening Roy Reuther, in a fiery address, advised his audience to proceed to the police station and to demand the release of their two comrades. A crowd of about 150 strikers and sympathizers, “shouting loudly for justice,” gathered at the police station, but when Reuther and a few others entered the building to request the release of the two unionists, they were denied an audience. There were shouts from the strikers to free the men by force, but Reuther, seeking to avoid trouble, urged rather that Michael Evanoff, a local attorney representing the union, be summoned. Evanoff arrived after about twenty minutes and described the legal steps he would follow in the case,
whereupon union speakers advised the crowd to return to union headquarters.

The unionists had begun to disperse when the doors of the police station opened, and about ten officers wearing gas masks and aprons filled with gas bombs filed out onto the steps and, in a ridiculous action reminiscent of the Haymarket Affair, called to the retreating unionists to return and then warned them that they would be subjected to a gas attack if they did not disperse. The police followed the crowd to the next corner, keeping the throng covered with gas guns. There were some "ugly murmurs" from the unionists and some threats of reprisals for this totally unnecessary show of force, which can only be described as deliberately provocative, but the evening passed without further incident. Barringer thought that the demonstration outside the police station warranted the intervention of the state police in Flint, but his efforts to secure such assistance were unavailing. In view of what had occurred, it is no wonder that the union interpreted the police behavior on January 11 outside the Fisher Body No. 2 plant as being part of a premeditated action to eject the sit-downers from the factory.

In the UAW view, among the city and county officials with whom the union dealt in Flint only Sheriff Wolcott, described by Kraus as "a cartoonist's image of the typical sheriff: enormously paunchy, battered slouch hat, unlit cigar stub in mouth-corner," was "inclined to be fair." Travis, who thought of the city police as "tools" of GM, considered Wolcott to be "a decent guy," and Kraus characterized him as a Democrat who "thoroughly hated" his assignment and who was the closest among the local officials to Murphy's point of view.

The Flint Board of Education and many of the city's school teachers evidenced a marked animus toward the strikers and the union. Merlin Bishop reported at a meeting of the strike council in the No. 1 plant on January 28 that Flint teachers were attempting to start an anti-strike movement among the school children. Teachers were reported to have asked their students to write essays on the "wrongs" of the sit-down and to have made adverse comments to children who wore their fathers' union buttons to class. One school teacher complained after the strike that the "spirit of lawlessness" of the strikers had affected their children and that teachers had had to deal with "this defiance of authority." The Board of Education turned down a request from the UAW to use a school auditorium for a meeting on the ground that school buildings should not be used at a time of crisis for a purpose that would "tend to cause dissention [sic]." When a small group of
teachers who were members of the Flint Federation of Teachers issued a statement supporting the UAW and criticizing the Flint Alliance and GM, they were denounced by school authorities as “a group of a dozen parlor pinks, representing less than one per cent of the teaching staff” and were reportedly subjected to “open intimidation” by their superiors. Contracts of five of the teachers involved were not renewed in the spring.68

The Flint Journal was denounced by one La Follette Committee investigator as being “purely a General Motors Company organ” and by another as being partly responsible for “the definite cleavage” in the community.69 It treated strike leaders as “agitators,” emphasized the loyalty to the company of its workers, and insisted that the sit-downers were armed. The UAW began distributing form letters addressed to the Journal cancelling the sender’s subscription because of the newspaper’s “flagrant one-sidedness” and its alleged distortion of strike news.100

The leading business and professional people in Flint, concerned about the threat to property rights posed by the strike and interlocked in so many ways with GM and GM executives, identified themselves with the Flint Alliance and were hostile to the strike. The Flint Chamber of Commerce thus blamed “a small minority” for the “almost complete stagnation” of the city’s business and for injuring its reputation as a peaceful community where there had always been a “fine relationship” between employer and employee, and it objected to the “unjust and violent methods” used by the strikers.101 Some of the smaller Flint businessmen, however, and particularly some of the merchants who catered to GM workers were sympathetic to the union cause and supported it with contributions in cash or in kind and by a generous extension of credit to strikers who were pressed for funds.102

The strike probably had its most divisive effect among the working class in Flint and particularly among the largest segment of that group, the GM workers. What has already been said of GM workers in general was true of Flint’s GM workers in particular: a small minority belonged to the union, a far larger number opposed the strike, and a very substantial group were “just sort of watching” to see what the outcome of the conflict would be. Nonstrikers in Flint as in other GM towns complained about being deprived of work by a minority and about the city’s being “overrun” by outsiders who were allegedly “terrorizing” the populace, and there was talk, but no more than that, that loyal workers would march on the plants to reclaim their jobs. On the other hand, the union appears to have increased its membership steadily throughout the strike, and the wife of one sit-downer wrote her husband early in February, “Every place you go in Flint you see Union buttons flashing. Every body wears them. . . ."
The intensity of the union feeling and the divisions that the strike created in Flint were revealed in the letter of another wife who informed her husband sitting in the Chevrolet No. 4 plant that she would make no more purchases from her cheese man since he was "scabby" and that she guessed that she would quit the Ladies Aid since "Those old hens make me sick."  

The segment of the Flint community whose reaction to the strike can be most fully documented is the membership of the Methodist Episcopal church, Flint's largest Protestant denomination. The sympathetic treatment of the strike in the denomination's organ, the *Michigan Christian Advocate*, was met with a barrage of criticism from church communicants. Shortly after the strike, in an effort to aid the editors of the *Advocate* in determining "where our people stand," the Reverend Gernsley F. Gorton, the minister of the Flint Oak Park Methodist Episcopal church, polled his membership about the sit-down. Among those who replied to the questionnaires, thirty indicated that they had opposed the strike, and only six that they had favored it; thirty-one disapproved of the methods of the strikers, four approved; and thirty blamed the strikers for such rioting as had occurred, three the nonstrikers.  

The superintendent of the Flint district of the Methodist Episcopal church, the Reverend R. M. Atkins, was a social-gospel advocate and was one of the few Flint clergymen who was partial to the strikers, but the Gorton poll and the numerous letters sent to the editors of the *Michigan Christian Advocate* and to Gorton suggest that most of the Flint communicants of the Methodist Episcopal church, including members of the working class, did not agree with Atkins. These letters and the comments on the Gorton poll reflect the standard themes expressed by strike opponents throughout the land: GM the good employer ("We do not claim ... [that GM] has reached perfection in their relationship with their employees, nevertheless, I believe they have come as close to it as any other large corporation and a lot closer than many of them"); the illegality of the sit-down ("I cannot reconcile myself to endorse a condition in which a group of men have seized property which is not their own"); the criticism of outsiders ("a clever, unscrupulous, highly organized crew of outsiders"); the fear of labor domination ("The fight is not for the right to organize, but against the dread dictatorship of John L. Lewis"); and the Communist character of the sit-down ("We can see in the strike leaders' strategy, more implications of Communism and Anarchism than desire for betterment of the automobile workers").  

Although there are no separate figures for Flint, it would appear, judging from the Gallup poll, that there was somewhat more support
for the UAW and the strikers outside of Flint than at the center of the conflict. The first Gallup poll on the strike, released on January 31, 1937, revealed that 53 percent of those who had an opinion favored "the employers" as compared to 47 percent who favored "the John L. Lewis group of striking employees." In the East Central area (Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois), where the strike centered, the percentage of company supporters rose to 57, and the percentage of union supporters fell to 43. Persons on relief (69 percent) and Roosevelt voters (59 percent) favored the strikers, but farmers (60 percent) and Landon voters (79 percent) favored GM.107

Considering the challenge that the sit-down strike seemed to pose to property rights and the poor phrasing of the Gallup question from the UAW point of view—Travis suggested that "John L. Lewis group of striking employees" be changed to "union" or, if the original phrasing for the UAW were retained, that "company" be altered to "Dupont-Morgan group of Employers"108—the GM strike enjoyed a surprisingly large degree of public support at the end of January, a reflection, no doubt, of widespread popular approval of the right of workers to organize free from employer interference.

A second Gallup poll on the strike, published on February 7, revealed a slight ebbing of support for the strikers: the percentage favoring the Lewis group had now dropped to 44. Only 38 percent of those responding thought that Lewis represented the majority of GM workers, and only 34 percent thought that GM was wrong in refusing to negotiate while sit-down strikers occupied its plants. Business Week, however, was probably correct in its judgment that although a majority of the people opposed the strike, they nevertheless believed that the "worst thing" GM could do would be to use force against strikers who were behaving in an exemplary fashion and were not physically damaging the company's property. The prevailing view, as Business Week saw it, was that "it's 'not right' for the strikers to stay in or for the company to throw them out." GM, it would seem, agreed with this judgment.109

Some of the opponents of the strike believed that Lewis was seeking to establish "a labor dictatorship" and that he must be stopped before it was too late.110 Power, although not necessarily dictatorial power, was, of course, what the dispute was all about, the desire of one side to maintain its power, the desire of the other to circumscribe that power and to augment its own, and it would be the task of the negotiators and the public officials who involved themselves in the dispute to register in the language of a settlement the degree, if any, to which the power relationships prevailing in the GM domain before 1937 had been altered by the strike.