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"A piece of the pie:" An oral history of the union movement at the Bethlehem Steel Corporation.

Mindy Kaye Small

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"A PIECE OF THE PIE:"

An Oral History

of the

Union Movement

at

The Bethlehem Steel Corporation

by

Mindy Kaye Small

A THESIS

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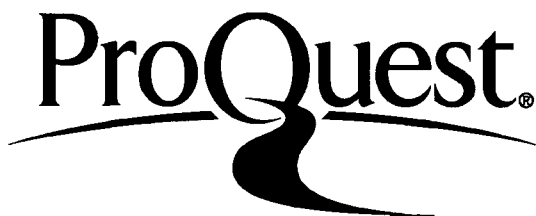
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July 15, 1976
(date)

Professor in Charge

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"A Piece of the Pie:"

An Oral History of the Union Movement at
The Bethlehem Steel Corporation

by

Mindy K. Small

Abstract

In 1936 the Committee for Industrial Organization and the Steel Workers Organizing Committee began a campaign to organize the nation's steel workers around an independent union based on industrial lines. From the outset, these two groups faced a traditionally tough and formidable adversary. The American steel industry, throughout its history, had maintained a policy of anti-unionism and gained a reputation as staunch defenders of the open shop principle. However, during the 1930's, new circumstances arose which threatened the steel industry's ability to sustain this position indefinitely and insured the eventual success of the union drive.

The 1930's created a ripe atmosphere for labor to demand their share of rights and privileges under the law. As a result of the Great Depression, labor gained a new and influential ally in the federal government. In particular, the Wagner Act legitimized unions and made labor's right to collective bargaining a matter of public policy. Thus, pro-unionists received a legal basis of support which proved vital to the successful implementation of their objectives.

From the start, union leaders allocated a considerable amount of time and effort to organizing the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. This firm, the largest and most powerful of the independent steel producers, represented a prime target for union agitation. In 1941, the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, concentrated an entire phase of their drive around the company's main plant at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. In doing so, they took on a decisive challenge due, in part, to Bethlehem's staunch opposition to unionism. Their activities culminated in a four day strike which ended in victory for the union. As a result of Bethlehem's concession, the remaining unorganized producers also signed union contracts.

The organizing drive at Bethlehem forced many steel workers to decide what their personal role in the union struggle would be. Their attitudes toward the company, the union and their daily working experiences affected their decisions tremendously. Those that supported the union did so for various reasons, however, their primary purpose was to gain security, protection, and better and safer working conditions. Moreover, many workers joined the union because they believed that the best way to achieve these goals was through collective action represented by an independent union.

Introduction

Since its emergence after the Civil War, the American steel industry maintained a long-established tradition of anti-unionism and a reputation as staunch defenders of the open shop principle. After defeating a major attempt by labor, in 1919, to reverse this position, the industry remained unorganized and relatively free from labor strife and disturbances throughout the 1920's. However, in a little more than a decade the whole course of labor relations in the steel industry was drastically altered. By 1941, the United Steel Workers of America, an independent union based on industrial lines, represented the nation's steel workers as their exclusive bargaining agent throughout the entire industry. A number of related factors and conditions produced this profound change.

For the most part, the events surrounding the decade of the 1930's had stimulated a renewed interest in unionism among labor leaders, union organizations and individual workers themselves. The major impetus behind this activity resulted from the economic depression and the effects it had on the American working classes in general. Eventually, this interest grew into a full scale labor movement as workers found it increasingly necessary to create a line of defense against the fluctuations in the business cycle.

An organization to secure and protect their rights, regardless of the prevailing economic or political situation, seemed the only alternative to their dilemma. The need and/or demand for unionization was not new or original. Previous hard times and bad conditions had produced similar reactions from labor, however, their attempts at unionization usually ended in failure. What specific circumstances insured the eventual success of this particular movement and were they unique in this period in American labor history?

Basically, the 1930's set the stage and created a ripe atmosphere for labor to demand their equal share of rights and privileges under the law. As a result of the severity of the depression, the nation and the public were awakened to the plight of labor in an industrialized society and thus, began backing worker demands for organization. But more important, labor found a new and influential ally in the federal government. The pro-labor posture of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal legislation, particularly the National Industrial Recovery Act and the Wagner Act, aided labor's cause tremendously. Moreover, this legislation helped insure the ultimate success of the union campaign. These Acts legitimized unions and made labor's right to collective bargaining a matter of public policy. Without this specific kind of aid and support, the union movement of the 1930's might have gone the way of other ones before it. However, this time labor gained a

legal basis of backing which proved vital to the successful implementation of their objectives. Thus, labor could forge ahead in the process of unionizing the nation's mass production industries, and in particular, the steel industry.

Moreover, the creation of the Committee for Industrial Organization, in 1936, supplied the workers with an organization dedicated to their cause. The CIO set out to organize America's mass production workers into independent unions based on industrial lines. Within the scope of trade unionism, this particular concept of organization increased in popularity. Before the depression, most unionized workers were skilled tradesmen. This left out the large and still growing number of unskilled and semi-skilled workers employed by the major industries. It was this later group which the CIO hoped to influence and ultimately organize. Thus, with this objective in mind, the nation's steel producers became a prime area of interest and concern to the CIO. The eventual unionization of this industry represented a decisive challenge to all those involved and required a considerable amount of time, money and effort. Although labor had the support of the federal government and a majority of the public behind them, the road ahead was difficult because of the power and influence of the American steel industry itself.

In order to meet the challenge, the CIO established the Steel Workers Organizing Committee in 1936. Immediately, they began to pursue the objectives expressed above and worked to reverse the industry's conventional policies and position. Quite unexpectedly,

the steel union met with an important success rather early on in their drive. In 1937, United States Steel, known as Big Steel, signed a contract with the union, making them the first American steel producer to surrender under the union's pressure. This agreement proved decisive because it broke the industry's traditional united front against unionism.

The next phase of the union's campaign was much more difficult and time consuming. The nation's large independent steel producers, known collectively as Little Steel, refused to follow the lead of Big Steel. This group of industrialists banded together in their anti-union fight and thus, managed to hold off the advance of unionism for a few more years. Although their efforts were aimed at defeating the 1936 union drive in steel, they failed to develop and implement a strategy strong enough to stem the tide of unionism altogether.

Basically, the U.S. Steel settlement represented one more step in the process which caused the inevitable breakdown of steel's resistance to unionism. The depression and the resultant pressures brought on by government legislation, the CIO and SWOC, and the public made the triumph of unionism only a matter of time. Throughout the 1930's, the steel industry found it increasingly necessary to yield, at least in part, to labor's demands. Many steel producers developed and implemented a number of different employee related programs and plans to create a more contented work force and to quell the renewed demand for outside unionism. Their

efforts included welfare programs, stock subscription plans, and employee representation plans--everything short of actual unionism. Thus, when a specific company or the industry in general had depleted the number of alternative programs it was willing to offer and when the plans had run their course, the only logical step to insure industrial peace seemed to be the recognition of independent unions. Little Steel held out for a while, but, as the decade progressed, new events and circumstances, specifically the fear of war and the resultant rearmament program, adversely affected their ultimate objectives. Thus, the industry became more and more vulnerable to the threat of unionism as time wore on.

Since their inception, the Steel Workers Organizing Committee allocated a considerable amount of time and effort to organizing the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. However, in 1941, they specifically concentrated an entire phase of their drive and centered all their activities around the company's main plant located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. This firm, being the largest of the independent producers and one of the most powerful within the Little Steel group, represented a prime target for union agitation. The union's leaders analyzed the prevailing situation carefully and concluded that if Bethlehem conceded, the rest of Little Steel would follow shortly thereafter.

This thesis deals primarily with the circumstances leading up to and the actual events surrounding the union's campaign against Bethlehem Steel. The rise and decline of Bethlehem's company union or Employee Representation Plan reflected the actual

trends that developed on a national scale which directly influenced the course of the labor movement. The company union played a significant role during the period between the two major labor struggles (1919-1936) in the steel industry. At Bethlehem, the company union managed to survive from its inception during World War I until the union's challenge in 1941. Throughout the 1930's, however, doubt and criticism regarding its relevance and effectiveness increased and eventually contributed, in part, to its demise. Thus, the depression, the CIO and the federal government had taken their toll.

This thesis is a case study of the grievances and needs of Bethlehem's labor force which ultimately led the workers to struggle for unionization. Revealing the motivations and events at Bethlehem can serve to broaden our understanding of the union drive elsewhere. The conditions and attitudes which forced many individual steel workers across the nation to actively fight for union recognition transcended the physical boundaries of a particular plant or company. For the most part, working conditions, wages and hours varied slightly throughout the industry as a whole. However, each individual steel worker reacted to his own set of experiences and opinions before he eventually decided what form his future role in the labor movement would take.

Retired employees of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation participated in tape recorded interviews, either individually or in a group, which helped clarify and document the actual events and

effects of the union's organizing drive there. All those interviewed worked at the Bethlehem, Pennsylvania plant before the depression or began working there in the years 1930-1945, coinciding with the second major attempt and eventual success at organizing Bethlehem Steel. Their recollections and accounts gave a personal flavor to the story. But more important, they explained their own individual experiences resulting from this significant period in American labor history which directly touched their lives in almost every way. The stories they recounted involved their particular roles in the actual events that ensued at the firm.

The interviews specifically used in this paper came from a sample chosen by the author. Out of a total of forty-five researched tapes, only twenty-two were used. For the most part, the interviews incorporated in this paper were the ones that best expressed all or most of the aspects concerning the union question as it related to Bethlehem Steel and the individual subjects themselves.

The inquiry included topics regarding the individual's personal employment history at the company: his attitude toward and relationship with the company, his fellow workers, foremen and supervisors, and his actual on the job experiences. Questions also centered on the person's attitude toward work in general and the benefits or disadvantages therein, and life-time goals and ambitions. In addition, discussions revolved around the workers job description, pride in work accomplished and desire for advancement. Moreover, the

participants explained their feelings and attitudes about the union question and unionism in general. From there, they recalled personal experiences relative to the organizing drive that occurred there.

There was considerable variation among the group in job experiences and job stability. Some advanced to higher positions as foreman or supervisors before their retirement. Others had similar opportunities but turned them down because they refused to accept the responsibility. The assortment of positions or jobs held included bricklayer, roller, scrubber, fireman, machinist, car repairman, watchman, craneman, rivetheater, smelter, and welder.

As their jobs varied, so did the departments in which they worked, the ethnic and religious composition of their fellow workers, the personalities of their particular foreman and their attitudes toward work in general. All these factors influenced and helped shape their opinions toward the union itself.

Singularly, these accounts merely state the recollections or personal histories of individual steel workers concerning their daily experiences and relationship with Bethlehem Steel at a particular period of time. Collectively, however, they form part of the history surrounding the actual unionization of Bethlehem; itself being only a part of the national drive to organize the entire basic steel industry in America.

All those interviewed recalled the drive for union recognition. Their roles ranged from striker to "scab," organizer to non-participant, but all felt the effects of the union question

in their daily encounters. However, many workers took advantage of the prevailing situation, joined the steel union and actively fought for the rights and privileges they needed and demanded.

Chapter I

The Atmosphere

Throughout most of the first half of the twentieth century, the American steel industry remained a staunch proponent of anti-unionism and the open shop; a position easily maintained with the existence of a largely unorganized labor force in steel. With the crushing defeat of unionism in the steel strike of 1919, virtually all attempts to organize the industry came to a grinding halt. However, the occurrence of certain historical factors and conditions forced the industry to reverse its long standing position.

The events surrounding the decade of the 1930's drastically altered the course of American labor history. Although the economic crisis took its toll on all segments of society, its effects on industrial labor were profound. During the depression, the nation experienced massive unemployment, hunger, insecurity and other extreme hardships. These severe conditions fostered new fears and anxieties among the working classes, or at least intensified the old ones.

By the second half of the decade, the economy had improved considerably. Industry faced a new wave of consumer demand and a rise in production followed. This resulted in an increase in the number of available jobs. These factors helped the country recover from its physical and economic wounds. However, the impact

of the depression, left deep emotional scars on the lives of many individual workers and their families--an imprint that proved difficult to erase.

For many laborers, the depression created a greater awareness of their economic problems and stimulated a renewed interest in unionism. Labor had to establish a line of defense in the event of future depressions and against the normal ups and downs brought on by the erratic nature of the economy. An independent union, free from the controls of business and management, would advance the cause of labor, secure the rights and privileges they demanded, and provide the protection and security they needed. In short, they wanted an organization that would work solely in their behalf and represent their wishes whenever necessary.

These goals and ideas were not new or original. However, the circumstances that aroused a revival of interest in them were unique. The historical factors and events of the 1930's heightened the desirability and necessity of unionism. In addition to the depression, two powerful forces contributed in creating a ripe atmosphere for the advance of labor: the federal government and the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO).

The federal government influenced the renewed trend toward unionism and provided an important impetus to the growth of a new labor movement. The pro-labor stance of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the legislation enacted by the New Deal marked the changing attitude of the federal government toward the rights of labor and helped foster a new awareness within society. Public opinion began supporting

labor's demands as the nation increasingly realized the necessity for organizing the unskilled worker. Under the New Deal, the United States Government, for the first time, had a national labor policy that favored the workingman. In particular, labor's right to collective bargaining was legitimized and made a matter of public policy: first, through the 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), and later, through the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), more commonly referred to as the Wagner Act.

The NIRA guaranteed something for both business and labor. Business could draft code agreements exempt from the anti-trust laws and labor received Section 7(a) which guaranteed them the right to collective bargaining.¹ Moreover, the codes had to set minimum wages and maximum hours. Roosevelt created a series of labor boards to maintain industrial peace and give some substance to 7(a).² Later, the boards formulated a rough body of labor laws. Basically, the NIRA allowed workers to decide through elections the kind of representation they desired--a nationally affiliated union, a company union or no union at all. Also, any union chosen by a majority of the workers would have exclusive bargaining rights for all workers. Thus, if the company union only represented a minority of the em-

¹William E. Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), pp. 57-58.

²Ibid., p. 107.

ployees, it would virtually be outlawed. The board insisted that Section 7(a) required employers to bargain with unions in good faith, and that bargaining must lead to some sort of an agreement.³ However, on May 27, 1935, the Supreme Court, in a unanimous 9-0 decision, found the National Industrial Recovery Act unconstitutional.

Then on July 5, 1935, Roosevelt signed one of the most important legislative documents of the period, the National Labor Relations Act.⁴ The Act started from the same premise as Section 7(a) of the NIRA--that is, that workers should be free to choose their own unions and employers must abstain from interfering in their choice.

Employees shall have the right of self-organization, to form, join, or assist labor organizations, to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and to engage in concerted activities, for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection. 5

The NLRA also required that employers accept duly constituted unions as legitimate representatives of their employees and bargain with them. Basically, it compelled employers to move toward the unionization of their plants. The act listed five unfair labor practices which only an employer could commit. The Wagner Act did not impose

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 151.

⁵Henry Steel Commager, ed., Documents of American History, The National Labor Relations Act, Vol. II, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crafts, 1968), p. 315.

any reciprocal obligations on unions.⁶ The courts already had a number of laws concerning unfair labor practices by unions and it was not considered necessary to add to them in the Act.⁷

In addition, the Wagner Act provided for a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB); a permanent independent agency empowered to supervise and conduct elections to determine the desired bargaining agent of a majority of workers in a plant, to restrain business from committing unfair labor practices, and to hold hearings based on the former from complaints filed by employees or labor organizations themselves. Thus, by establishing the NLRB, the Act provided the machinery for its own enforcement. In 1937, the Supreme Court, in a 5-4 ruling, upheld the rights of labor when it found the Wagner Act constitutional.

The legislation enacted under the New Deal gave labor something they never enjoyed before--a legal basis of support to forge ahead in unionizing America's major industries. In the end, this support laid the necessary foundations to insure a successful organizing campaign. Moreover, the pro-labor outlook of Roosevelt's Administration gave labor a psychological advantage and strengthened morale by rallying the support of public opinion behind its cause.

The second powerful force contributing to the growth of a new labor movement came with the creation of the Committee for

⁶Leuchtenburg, Roosevelt and the New Deal, p. 151.

⁷Carl N. Degler, Out of Our Past (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1970), p. 403.

Industrial Organization. The renewed attempts to organize the steel industry first developed out of a split within the American Federation of Labor (AFL) between those forces advocating craft unionism and those pushing for industrial unionism. John L. Lewis, head of the United Mine Workers (UMW), led those strongly supporting the creation of a new international union based on industrial lines with complete jurisdiction over all workers. Finally, in 1936, Lewis' efforts produced results. After considerable controversy and debate among both factions within the AFL, the storm subsided with the establishment of the CIO under the leadership of John L. Lewis. Lewis later remarked:

Out of the agony and travail of economic America the C.I.O. was born. To millions of Americans, exploited without stint by corporate industry and socially debased beyond the understanding of the fortunate, its coming was as welcome as the dawn to the nightwatcher. . . . It is now and henceforth a definite instrumentality destined greatly to influence the lives of our people and the internal course of the Republic. 8

Ultimately, Lewis' statement proved correct.

The CIO made the organization of the steel industry one of its prime targets.⁹ Poor planning and lack of adequate finances hampered previous attempts, in 1892 and 1919, at creating an independent labor organization in the steel industry.¹⁰ However,

⁸"Labor," Time, 30, September 13, 1937, p. 11.

⁹Walter Galenson, The CIO Challenge to the AFL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 79.

¹⁰William T. Hogan, Economic History of the Iron and Steel Industry in the United States, Vol. III, (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Co., 1971), p. 1170.

the leaders involved in this new organizing drive benefited from the lessons learned from previous blunders and applied their knowledge to the task. This time the powerful influence of the United Mine Workers stood behind the CIO's drive for steel unionization and it devoted much of its resources to an organizational effort.¹¹ For the massive undertaking of organizing the steel industry, millions of dollars, a considerable amount of time, and intense planning went into the effort. Experienced and already powerful and prominent labor leaders came to the fore to pursue the objective and conduct the drive. Thus, the CIO created a confident and diligent atmosphere that influenced the decisions of many individual steel workers to join their ranks and to take active roles in the campaign to unionize the American steel industry. Moreover, by 1937, the economy had improved considerably; a factor which not only aided industry and labor, but the organizing efforts of the CIO as well.

This pro-labor atmosphere reinforced the beliefs of many steel workers across the country and encouraged them to stand firm in their convictions regarding the union question. For the most part, this kind of contemplation helped them determine their future role in the advancing drive to organize the steel industry. Many steel workers took advantage of the situation, joined the CIO, and became active unionists to gain for themselves, "a piece of the pie."

¹¹Ibid., p. 1169.

Chapter II

SWOC and Big Steel

The CIO's campaign to organize steel began with the creation of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC), on June 4, 1936, under the chairmanship of Philip Murray, vice-president of the United Mine Workers Union. Other SWOC committee members included: M.F. Tighe, Joseph Gaither and Thomas G. Gillis of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers; Julius Hochman, vice-president of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union; Leo Kryzycki of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers; Van A. Bittner, David McDonald and P.F. Fagan of the UMW; and John Brophy, also of the UMW and executive director of the CIO. David McDonald became the secretary-treasurer of SWOC. The union appointed Clinton S. Golden, one-time official of the NLRB, Bittner, president of the West Virginia miners' union, and William Mitch, district mine president of Alabama as northeastern, western and southern regional directors respectively.¹

John L. Lewis, who was responsible for SWOC's formation, remained apart from the union's hierarchy. Instead, Lewis worked toward making himself a potent force in national labor politics. However, with Lewis' aid, the CIO set out, in 1936, to increase its

¹"Labor," Time, 28, June 6, 1936, p. 17.

strength and prestige. By that time, the CIO represented a membership totaling 1,300,000. However, the union hoped to widen its base and boost its numbers by appealing to steel's one-half million workers. Lewis remarked:

This is to be a campaign that has no terminal facilities, that has no deadline. It is a fight that is going to go on until the workers in the steel industry have the right to organize in unions of their own choice and decide conditions of their own working life in the same manner as workers in other industries. ²

In planning their campaign, SWOC faced not only an industry that employed approximately 479,000 workers, but also an industry with a long standing reputation as the stronghold of the open shop in America. Both employment and output were concentrated in large steelworks and rolling mills. United States Steel was by far the largest employer with 220,000 workers; next came Bethlehem Steel, with 80,000; 49,000 worked for Republic Steel; and 29,000 at Jones and Loughlin. ³

To meet the challenge, a few hundred organizers from the CIO moved to the nation's steel centers to publicize SWOC, recruit new members and establish local lodges. In addition, on August 1, 1936, the union began publication of its own newspaper called Steel Labor.

Both the CIO and SWOC hoped to stay within the law and

²Ibid.

³Galenson, CIO, Challenge to the AFL, p. 87.

avoid violence in their organizing drive. Lewis stated that the CIO's purpose was "to conduct this campaign in a perfectly legal manner. . . . The Committee desires to avoid industrial strife and disturbance or violence of any character."⁴ But SWOC's actions depended upon the steel companies' reactions to the new campaign aimed directly at their labor force. To avoid a major controversy resulting in violence, SWOC needed a reasonable amount of cooperation from the steel employers. However, SWOC maintained little confidence toward that end, evidenced by Lewis' statement: "If the steel industry insists on a fight we have no alternative but to meet them. I should judge that they would do just that thing. They always have."⁵

The steel industry, as expected, opposed the new organizing attempt and responded by appealing to the public and the steel workers themselves. In July, 1936, the American Iron and Steel Institute, representing ninety-five per cent of the nation's producers, took out a full page advertisement in 375 metropolitan newspapers, denouncing the idea of a closed shop and the overthrow of the employee representation plans. Part of the ad read as follows:

A campaign to unionize the employes of the steel industry has been announced. . . . Persons and organizations not connected with the industry

⁴"Labor," Time, 28, July 13, 1936, p. 11.

⁵Ibid.

have taken charge of the campaigns. There are many disturbing indications that the promoters of the campaign will employ coercion and intimidation of the employees in the industry, and foment strikes. . . . The steel industry will oppose any attempt to compel its employees to join a union or to pay tribute for the right to work. . . .⁶

Thus, the American steel industry prepared itself for resisting the SWOC campaign and planned its strategy from there.

However, the steel masters' plan of action for resisting unionism, less wholehearted than before and the tactics reminiscent of those used in 1919, eventually rendered them ineffective. Part of their strategy included the immediate implementation of a propaganda campaign to discourage labor from being swayed by the rhetoric of pro-union men and their leaders. To begin with, they blamed the resurgence of unionism on communist and radical influences within the CIO and accused the union's organizers of using scare tactics to intimidate and coerce workers into their ranks. Moreover, the employers intended to convince labor that the company union was an adequate mechanism to secure and protect their rights.⁷

Ultimately, the industry's propaganda campaign was thwarted. Public opinion was much more sympathetic to unions than it had been during the 1919 strike, largely because of the crash

⁶"Labor," Time, 28, July 6, 1936, p. 16.

⁷Joseph G. Rayback, A History of American Labor (New York: The Free Press, 1966), p. 351.

and the depression. Moreover, the passage of a generation and the prevailing economic conditions limited the effectiveness of promoting tensions between native and immigrant workers, a tactic successfully employed by management in earlier drives. Immigration restriction, in 1921 and 1924, reduced the number of new Eastern Europeans working in the mills, and naturalization took care of many others; most immigrant steel workers were now firmly committed to their new country. For the most part, the steel companies could no longer rely on reviving xenophobic prejudices as a tactic to promote tensions between native born and immigrant workers in the plants.⁸ Thus, many who disagreed with the industry's position and methods either grew sympathetic to SWOC's cause or went one step beyond and joined the union. Also, many steel workers grew skeptical of the company union and the process involved in electing its representatives: ". . . the steel workers recognize the farcical nature of these elections, in which the only choice permitted is a choice of company-union representatives."⁹ However, the nation's steel producers continued their anti-union policy and thus, set the stage for a confrontation.

SWOC leaders, realizing the hopelessness of easily gaining support and recognition from the steel companies themselves, continued

⁸ David Brody, Labor in Crisis (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1965), p. 181.

⁹ "Steel Declares War," The New Republic, 87, July 8, 1936, p. 256.

planning their strategy and tactics. The union's first major effort centered around the Carnegie-Illinois plant, a subsidiary of the largest and most influential of the steel manufacturers-- the United States Steel Corporation. U.S. Steel, master of forty-per cent of the steel industry, had refused to recognize an outside union since its formation in 1901. Lewis once remarked that, "United States Steel through the years has been the crouching lion in the pathway of Labor."¹⁰ SWOC expected that those companies comprising what was known as Little Steel¹¹ would follow any major decisions made by Big Steel (U.S. Steel); a strategy which, at the outset, seemed logical. However, the outcome of the organizational effort directed at U.S. Steel and the subsequent reaction of Little Steel surprised almost everyone.

The Employee Representation Plan (ERP) or company union was a prime target for SWOC agitation. Industrial unionists focused much of their attention and efforts around the ERP because it represented the only real center of organization within the steel industry.¹² The union's strategy included the infiltration

¹⁰"Labor," Time, 29, March 15, 1937, p. 17.

¹¹The companies collectively known as Little Steel included: Bethlehem, Republic, Jones and Laughlin, Youngstown Sheet and Tube, National, Crucible, Inland, American Rolling Mill, Otis, Pittsburgh, and Sharon.

¹²See Chapter IV for more extensive information about the Employee Representation Plan at the Bethlehem Steel Corporation.

of the company union by pro-SWOC men. They hoped to gain support of company union representatives and thus, work from within to destroy the very foundations of the ERP. Sometimes this tactic worked and other times it failed; the actual results depended upon the company and the ERP involved.

The idea of employee representation grew out of a study made by the War Labor Board during World War I. At that time, it was important to maintain industrial peace in order to insure the uninterrupted flow of production. The War Board regarded employee representation as a viable means for settling labor disputes and suggested that company union's be installed in many American firms for just that purpose.¹³ However, the idea of employee representation spread even further after the great steel strike of 1919.

Actually, the steel companies saw employee representation at the time of its creation as: ". . . not designed to strengthen the bargaining position of workmen, but rather to provide, . . . , 'a definite and durable basis of mutual understanding and confidence,' or as Inland Steel stated, 'effective communication and means of contact. . . and to insure justice, maintain tranquility, and promote the general welfare.'"¹⁴

¹³ National Industrial Conference Board, Report of the Board, Collective Bargaining Through Employee Representation (New York: National Industrial Conference Board, Inc., 1933), p. 6.

¹⁴ David Brody, Steelworkers in America (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1960), p. 227.

Whether the companies truly believed that employee representation would accomplish these vague goals, remained to be seen. However, the implementation of these systems did help relieve a lot of the pressure directed at them from labor groups, the federal government and the public.

Although they did not state this publicly, most firms considered employee representation a means to discourage outside unionism.¹⁵ They based this belief on a number of assumptions. First, the presence of a system of shop government that handled employee grievances would presumably create a more contented work force. Thus, employees would be less likely to look elsewhere (outside the confines of the company) for aid and comfort. Second, the success of employee representation depended on the workers' comprehension and acceptance of an important stipulation: ". . . that the firm was an island cut off from contact with other companies in the same labor market or the same industry."¹⁶ Basically, this meant that workers employed in a specific industry, such as steel, but working for different companies, such as Bethlehem or U.S. Steel, would remain alienated from each other because of physical boundaries. Thus, their desire to band together in a union based on industrial lines would decrease and efforts to

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Irving Bernstein, The Lean Years (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), p. 170.

create a closed shop would be thwarted. For these reasons and also because ERP's were ineffective within the local shop or plant, labor leaders adamantly disapproved of employee representation plans and soon labeled them as anti-union devices.¹⁷

During the 1920's, a lot of American firms implemented employee representation plans; this action, represented a conceptual change in the attitude of some employers toward their labor force in general.¹⁸ Under previous terms of employment, workers had few guaranteed rights or privileges; they were considered, more or less, a commodity. The institution of employee representation systems helped change this perspective. Regardless of their reasons, employers worked toward developing a more contented labor force. Obviously, labor stood to gain something, even if it was minimal, from the new attitudes and methods adopted by management. However, the extent to which employers were willing to go in this direction, eventually determined the amount of success they achieved; to the steel industry, success meant, for the most part, the defeat of unionism and the continuation of the open shop.

However, employee representation surprised both businessmen and union leaders alike when it produced some unexpected results. Ironically, the ERP provided an important service to the unions. It

¹⁷ Brody, Steelworkers in America, p. 227.

¹⁸ Bernstein, The Lean Years, p. 170.

educated workers and made them aware of the potential benefits to be gained from collective bargaining. The experience and knowledge they acquired from the company union, convinced many workers to demand self-organization later on.¹⁹ Moreover, in many instances the ERP provided good training for future labor leaders and organizers.²⁰

In addition, specific employee representation plans, such as the one at Bethlehem Steel, received considerable publicity. Thus, the public increased its awareness of the problems that labor faced in an industrialized society. This knowledge aided labor's cause. "Employers who might later seek to turn the clock back would meet resistance not just from the labor movement but also from an enlightened public opinion."²¹

The depression of the 1930's and the resultant New Deal legislation, the NIRA and the NLRA, threatened the harmony in industrial relations which the steel companies enjoyed during the 1920's because of general prosperity and the ERP. "A change in steel industry labor relations was established by law."²²

In the early 1930's, ERP's sprang up in many companies. Most of the basic steel industry along with a number of fabricating

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 172.

²⁰ Hogan, Iron and Steel Industry, Vol. III, pp. 1167-1168.

²¹ Bernstein, The Lean Years, p. 186.

²² Hogan, Iron and Steel Industry, Vol. III, p. 1167.

mills adopted company unions. At the end of 1934, a minimum of 93 formal plans were in existence. They covered between 90 and 95 per cent of the plant workers in steel.²³ However, the installation of these plans, ". . . represented a method of compliance with the law without actually yielding to any outside labor organization."²⁴

However, many workers showed signs of dissatisfaction with this system of representation, even before SWOC was created.²⁵ These sentiments were particularly evident at U.S. Steel, where the company union was a relatively new phenomenon.²⁶ U.S. Steel installed its ERP at all its plants in 1933, after the enactment of the NIRA. In 1936, many of the employee representatives at several Carnegie-Illinois plants worked toward making the company unions more effective. They became increasingly more independent of management. These employee representatives demanded greater control over their organization, higher wages and better working conditions. Many of these men, through their experiences with the ERP, seemed more susceptible to an all-out appeal for unionization. "Far from placating the workers, the company unions became rallying

²³Irving Bernstein, Turbulent Years (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), p. 455.

²⁴Hogan, Iron and Steel Industry, Vol. III, p. 1167.

²⁵Ibid., p. 1168.

²⁶Galenson, CIO, Challenge to the AFL, p. 87.

points for independent action and pro-CIO sentiment."²⁷ SWOC leaders perceived this new activism among workers as beneficial to their objectives and prepared to take advantage of the situation. Thus, SWOC planned to infiltrate the company unions and take them over if necessary.

To accomplish this task, union organizers established contact with employee-representatives holding pro-union sympathies. "Philip Murray's plan was to operate through such representatives as these, encourage them to develop even greater independence, urge them to press the demands which they had already made and keep them 'biting at the heels of management.'²⁸"

Employee representatives, influenced by SWOC's program, pressed for a \$5.00 a day minimum wage, an eight-hour day, a forty-hour week, time-and-a-half for overtime, and recognition of central committees. In July, 1936, U.S. Steel announced its decision accepting the eight-hour day and a forty-eight hour week. A storm of protest arose from SWOC and many U.S. Steel employees, denouncing the decision as a trick to impose a forty-eight hour week after a forty-hour one was already in effect under the NIRA. As a result, many disillusioned workers supported SWOC's independent organizing efforts and joined their ranks.

²⁷ Brody, Labor in Crisis, p. 181.

²⁸ Robert R.R. Brooks, As Steel Goes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 90.

Benjamin F. Fairless, president of Carnegie-Illinois, refused to grant the wage increase demands on the grounds that the company was financially unable to do so. Philip Murray, SWOC's chairman, backing the company union's wage demands argued that the corporation's profits allowed them to meet workers' demands. Finally, the company agreed to put the wage increase into effect unilaterally in all its plants. "The SWOC was able to point to the wage increase as a vindication of its earlier position that the corporation could afford higher wages."²⁹

By November, 1936, SWOC's organizing drive had made substantial headway. The union claimed a total membership of 82,000 and the support of 1,534 out of 2,500 company union representatives in the steel industry.³⁰ But further progress in this area seemed unlikely, therefore, SWOC altered part of its basic strategy. After exploiting the company unions to the limit, SWOC moved toward the direction of securing an independent organization--its ultimate goal--to represent Carnegie-Illinois' employees. Therefore, to discredit the company union, SWOC filed charges with the NLRB against Carnegie-Illinois, alleging unlawful company domination of their ERP; SWOC called for the disestablishment of the company union. Thus, the union's strategy changed from infiltrating the company union to discrediting and forcing the break-

²⁹ Galenson, CIO, Challenge to the AFL, p. 90.

³⁰ Ibid.

down of these organizations; SWOC took full advantage of the pro-union and pro-labor stance of the federal government and demanded intervention and legislation regarding company unions. As the months passed, the influence of the ERP lessened and its chances before the NLRB appeared hopeless. Although progress moved slowly, SWOC carried on their intensive organizing campaign. In addition, a strike for SWOC's recognition seemed forthcoming.

The fear of an impending strike, along with other circumstances, brought a surprising outcome to SWOC's organizing drive aimed at Big Steel. After a series of secret meetings between John L. Lewis and Myron C. Taylor, U.S. Steel's Chairman of the Board, the United States Steel Corporation chose to end its long-standing opposition to unionism rather than face a lengthy strike. On March 2, 1937, Philip Murray and Benjamin F. Fairless signed an historic industrial agreement. Murray commented that, "This is unquestionably the greatest story in the history of the American Labor Movement."³¹

The agreement recognized SWOC as the bargaining agent for its members only, while SWOC agreed not to intimidate or coerce non-union employees into membership. In addition, the settlement granted the basic wage and hour demands of employee representatives and SWOC. The minimum daily wage was raised to five-dollars and a forty-hour week was established with time-and-a-

³¹"Labor," Time, 29, May 3, 1937, p. 74.

half pay for all hours in excess of eight-hours per day or forty-hours per week. Subsequently, a similar agreement was extended to other U.S. Steel subsidiaries. "But the unionization of U.S. Steel was a John L. Lewis triumph, pure and simple. . . . Now the chief bastion of the open shop had fallen without so much as a solitary picket."³² Lewis remarked about his meetings and negotiations with Taylor which produced this historic agreement. "We were each conscious of the great weight of responsibility and the far-reaching consequences attached to our decisions. Labor, industry, and the nation will be the beneficiaries."³³

Almost simultaneously, five of steel's independents--Bethlehem, National, Republic, Youngstown and Inland--granted the same wage and hour demands just announced by U.S. Steel and its subsidiaries. However, this action did not represent peaceful compliance or capitulation on the part of Little Steel with the SWOC-Big Steel agreement. The intention of Little Steel to adopt its own independent course of action and to maintain its anti-union tradition became increasingly evident as the months passed.

The responsibility for the successful unionization of U.S. Steel did not solely rest with the efforts of SWOC and their leaders. The corporation decided to bargain collectively with SWOC after

³²Thomas R. Brooks, Toil and Trouble (New York: Delacorte Press, 1964), p. 188.

³³"Labor," Time, 29, March 15, 1937, p. 17.

carefully evaluating the prevailing economic and political situation.³⁴ U.S. Steel, recovering from the adverse effects of the depression, began earning substantial profits, because of recovery and rearmament, and could not afford the consequences generated by a major strike. The company hoped to gain a contract from Great Britain, then in the process of arranging a purchase of large amounts of steel for its rearmament program. But they insisted on a guarantee of uninterrupted production before letting contracts.³⁵ Thus, the historic conditions of the period, both political and economic, directly influenced the outcome of the union movement aimed at Big Steel. The national political atmosphere which brought about specific New Deal legislation and the re-election of Roosevelt in 1936, with labor's backing, encouraged the union movement, influenced the steel settlement and marked a decided victory for trade unionism.

Unionization of the entire steel industry now seemed inevitable. Throughout the decade, the industry found it increasingly necessary to yield, at least partially, to labor's demands. Many steel firms implemented welfare programs, stock subscription plans, bonus systems, and employee representation plans--everything short of actual unionization. "Once it had in-

³⁴ Brooks, Toil and Trouble, p. 189.

³⁵ Ibid.

stalled employee representation, the United States Steel Corporation had exhausted its string of offers and when the plans had run their course, the only logical step that remained to insure orderly industrial relations seemed to be the recognition of an independent union."³⁶

Moreover, U.S. Steel found itself in an awkward position. Its Carnegie-Illinois employee representation plan faced investigation by the National Labor Relations Board, while the La Follette Civil Liberties Committee prepared an investigation of the corporation's labor espionage practices. Thus, the federal government and public opinion refused to support forcible suppression of trade unionism.³⁷

The resulting settlement marked a decided compromise between union and management forces. The union profited by gaining recognition, however, they abandoned one of their major objectives. According to the terms of the agreement, SWOC could not act as the sole collective bargaining agent on a company-wide basis. The contract allowed the union to represent only those employees holding membership in the union. Moreover, Carnegie-Illinois reserved the right to bargain with its company union or any other group of employees.

Nevertheless, the steel settlement pleased SWOC leaders

³⁶ Hogan, Iron and Steel Industry, Vol. III, p. 1176.

³⁷ Galenson, CIO, Challenge to the AFL, p. 95.

immensely. After Big Steel signed with the union, SWOC's membership grew rapidly. By May 1, 1937, the union claimed a membership of 280,000 steel workers within eighty-eight different companies. By that time, SWOC also negotiated union contracts with over fifty steel companies and almost five-hundred lodges functioned in the nation's steel centers. Also, a few of the smaller independent firms fell in line and signed contracts with SWOC. However, these impressive results in no way concluded SWOC's organizing campaign.

To the surprise of most everyone, Little Steel's reaction to the agreement brought the successful organizing drive to a momentary halt. The large independent steel producers thought Big Steel's concession, ". . . a shocking betrayal of the industry's traditional united front against unionism."³⁸ Although many of these firms immediately consented to and implemented the specific wage and hour demands set down by the SWOC-U.S. Steel agreement, they refused to sign similar contracts with SWOC or bargain with any labor organization outside of their own company unions. This necessitated the development of a new plan of action, on the part of SWOC, to meet their next challenge of organizing the Little Steel companies. Basically, ". . . the industry was only about half 'in the bag' and the independents controlled the other half."³⁹

³⁸"Labor," Time, 29, May 24, 1937, p. 11.

³⁹"Steel Interprets Wagner Act," Business Week, I, May 15, 1937, p. 15.

Chapter III

SWOC and Little Steel

The second phase of SWOC's organizing drive proved much more difficult and time consuming. This time SWOC faced a group of tough and violently anti-union steel masters putting forth a concerted effort to stop SWOC's continued success. The steel men involved in this included Eugene Grace of Bethlehem, Tom Girdler of Republic, Frank Purnell of Youngstown Sheet and Tube, Ernest T. Weir of National, L.E. Bloch of Inland, N.E. Lewis of Jones and Laughlin and Charles R. Hook at the American Rolling Mills. These larger independent steel companies employed more than 200,000 men and produced about one-fourth of the nation's steel. The management at these firms prepared to face the prospect of strikes and other such disturbances to maintain an open-shop in their companies. "In short, Little Steel was convinced that the cost of winning a strike was outbalanced by the future gains that would accrue from the absence of trade unions in the mills. The ideological convictions of the Little Steel leaders served to augment the value of the expected flow of future benefits."¹ Thus, Little Steel set the stage for the coming battle with SWOC.

¹ Galenson, CIO, Challenge to the AFL, p. 101.

Determined to use the strike only as a last resort, SWOC planned for future negotiations with steel's management and for potential use of the NLRB to gain progress toward their objective. Again, SWOC's tactics included capturing the employee representation plans at the remaining unorganized companies. Previous use of this scheme proved advantageous and SWOC seemed confident they could repeat that kind of success elsewhere. However, Republic felt SWOC's efforts would be futile since they maintained, what was in their eyes, a great industrial relations system with good men backing it up. But SWOC perceived the situation much differently. "Sure, they've got good men heading their shop groups. They've got the best men. All the same, they're going to be surprised to find that we've got the same men, in lots of cases. When it comes right down to a decision, this whole thing stands or falls on the will of the guys in the mills, and we've got the guys."² The union already claimed substantial progress at Jones and Laughlin, Youngstown and Inland. However, SWOC had little support at Bethlehem, except at the Cambria Works in Johnstown and probably not much even there; this was due, in large part, to the strength of Bethlehem's ERP.

In the spring of 1937, the union began the second phase of their organizing drive and concentrated most of their efforts around Jones and Laughlin. In May, SWOC called a strike at the

²"Next--The Steel Independents," Business Week, I, May 8, 1937, p. 17.

Aliquippa and Pittsburgh plants of that firm; they shut down the nations' fourth largest steel producer, threw 27,000 men out of work, and launched the biggest steel strike since 1919.³ The next day 6,000 employees of Pittsburgh Steel joined them. The Jones and Laughlin strike lasted only thirty-six hours with little violence occurring. The strike ended when management agreed to an NLRB election to determine by majority vote if SWOC should have exclusive bargaining rights for all its employees. With all the balloting in, the Labor Board confirmed SWOC's strength when it announced that 17,000 men, seventy per cent of those voting, supported SWOC. Thus, SWOC won their first major battle against Little Steel and became the exclusive bargaining agent for all Jones and Laughlin workers; the rest of the agreement resembled that of Big Steel's. Horace Edward Lewis, chairman of the company, commented on the settlement. "The Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation is gratified that such an important issue has been so amicably settled by peaceful and democratic methods, under the provisions of the Wagner Act."⁴ Moreover, he urged that all tensions be forgotten and all work be resumed. Other smaller steel firms followed suit, among them Crucible and Sharon Steel. However, SWOC's attempt to unionize the remaining portion of the Little Steel producers proved much more difficult and involved a far greater expenditure of time and resources.

³"Labor," Time, 29, May 24, 1937, p. 12.

⁴"Labor," Time, 29, May 31, 1937, p. 18.

The resistance of Little Steel partially decreased when the Supreme Court, in 1937, declared the Wagner Act constitutional. However, SWOC's problems continued when the steel independents agreed to bargain and perhaps enter into oral agreements with SWOC, but staunchly refused to put anything down in writing; a totally legal policy, according to the steel masters, since the Wagner Act required only bargaining, not written contracts. In regard to this policy, a determined Philip Murray remarked, "I tell you, a strike will inevitably trail in the wake of this maddening policy."⁵

SWOC, unwilling to tangle with Bethlehem Steel or National Steel at that time, centered their attention on three other large independents: Republic, Inland, and Youngstown Sheet and Tube. SWOC realized the necessity of continuing their winning streak, in regard to their organizational drive aimed at these next three companies. The union needed to win this fight in order to gain more momentum, keep up morale, and maintain public sentiment toward their cause. If they happened to lose in the Midwest steel area, public support of their objective might falter. "The industrial unionization cause will lose a great measure of 'ever victorious' psychology which has aided the movement thus far. Lines of defense will harden against it all over the country and it must meet more companies which will take Republic Steel's policy as a guide."⁶ Thus,

⁵"Labor," Time, 29, May 24, 1937, p. 12.

⁶"C.I.O.'s Fate Hinges on Steel Strike," Business Week, I, June 12, 1937, p. 13.

SWOC leaders, realizing the importance of a successful organizing drive, prepared for their next line of action.

A wave of bitter and violent strikes broke out in May, 1937, when the three firms--Republic, Inland and Youngstown--refused to make written agreements with SWOC, arguing that the Wagner Act did not require them to do so. After all other means failed, a strike call was issued. The walk-out effected twenty-seven steel plants, most of them in Ohio and Illinois. The shut-down virtually brought fifteen per cent of the steel industry to a standstill and kept 75,000 men out of work in the midst of steel's busiest season in years.⁷

Republic Steel defended their position when they declared that they practiced "collective bargaining" and paid "high wages." But they refused to sign a contract because it represented, in their opinion, the first step toward the eventual break down of the open-shop system and the ultimate success of outside unionism.⁸ In many respects, the industry's fears were justified, since SWOC and their members hoped to achieve those particular goals. Youngstown Sheet and Tube expressed similar sentiments and fears regarding signed contracts when they stated:

The signed agreement demanded of us could not be enforced by us because it would be a one-sided instrument whereunder the employer alone

⁷"Labor," Time, 29, June 7, 1937, p. 14.

⁸Ibid.

would possess legal responsibility. . . . The wage rates requested have been and are in effect. The company has been, now is and will continue to be willing to meet and negotiate with representatives chosen by its employes for all purposes of collective bargaining upon grievances, wages, hours of labor and conditions of work. 9

Thus, the three steel independents, believing they acted legally under the Wagner Act by bargaining but not signing contracts, followed a policy that forced them to face a shut down and its possible consequences. Little Steel also developed and followed a strategy which included sitting tight, waiting for back-to-work movements among anti-SWOC employees to begin, and hopefully increasing public support for the right-to-work concept.¹⁰

Strike action continued and at the Republic plant in Chicago an especially violent and bloody one transpired. The strike claimed ten lives and injured many others when police opened fire on the large crowd which contained both strikers and bystanders. Later, the La Follette Senate Committee, after investigating the incident, concluded that, "The first shots came from the police. . . unprovoked."¹¹ The so-called "Memorial Day Massacre," caused a sorrowful and outraged Van A. Bittner to remark, "I pledge to you, I pledge to my union, I pledge to my country and my God, that the men who committed those murders will be treated as murderers should

⁹ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

¹⁰ "Labor," Time, 29, June 14, 1937, p. 13.

¹¹ Brooks, Toil and Trouble, p. 190.

be treated."¹²

On June 11, 1937, workers struck the Bethlehem Steel Cambria Mill at Johnstown, Pennsylvania. John L. Lewis called the strike in sympathy with the one already in progress among two Railway Brotherhoods on the Conemaugh and Blacklick Railroad, a Bethlehem subsidiary; the ten-mile strip of railroad track connected the company's Cambria plant with the Pennsylvania Railroad. The railroad workers walked-out after the company refused to grant them a written contract.

The Cambria strike was unsuccessful due to the strength of the company union there and the weakness of SWOC; however, the plant did shut down for a week after Governor Earle declared martial law because of widespread violence. The plant finally reopened on June 27, as many steel workers returned to their jobs.

SWOC, for the first time in its organizing drive, faced the possibility of a major defeat. Although Bethlehem and Republic refused to even discuss the question of an oral or written agreement and were unwilling to meet with either Lewis or Murray, they did agree to meet with local union representatives on a plant by plant basis.¹³

Thus, something had to be done to settle the question of whether or not collective bargaining resulted if no written agreement

¹²"Labor," Time, 29, June 7, 1937, p. 15.

¹³Galenson, CIO, Challenge to the AFL, p. 107.

materialized from oral negotiations. For this was the major obstacle, preventing any further progress toward organizing America's steel workers. All of SWOC's efforts came to a standstill; unable to move in any direction since the Little Steel companies found a loophole in the Wagner Act and staked most of their anti-union fight on that one point.

The nation's steel employers refused to embody in a signed contract with the union the same terms they agreed to during negotiations. A contemporary magazine stated that, ". . . the issue, like the issue in most wars, is a symbol that embodies unrecognized and unreasoned emotional drives."¹⁴ Company officials believed that written agreements were unnecessary because obligations could be fulfilled without them. They included other reasons for following such a policy. First, contracts usually give unions too much power and prestige. Moreover, labor leaders demanded that written agreements be negotiated annually, even if the old contract did not need changes or improvements.¹⁵ The industry felt that this forced them to face the risk of shut-downs if the two parties failed to come to terms. Second, written terms of employment, being inflexible, do not meet rapidly changing conditions. Third, signed contracts do

¹⁴"Behind the Steel Strike," The New Republic, 91, June 16, 1937, p. 144.

¹⁵"Steel Bargaining and Agreement," The New Republic, 91, June 23, 1937, p. 172.

not guarantee industrial peace. Whether refusing to sign a contract would be an affective means of crushing the union movement altogether, remained to be seen. However, this tactic allowed the remaining unorganized companies to halt the union's progress for an indefinite period of time.

Regardless of Little Steel's reasons for not signing agreements with SWOC, the legal question still went unanswered. If a company refused to sign, were they really bargaining in good faith? This question remained unresolved and a threat to the future success of SWOC's organizing drive.

President Roosevelt had his own opinions concerning the problem of written contracts. The President stated that, "If a fellow was willing to enter a verbal agreement with his workers, common sense dictates that he should be willing to sign his name to it."¹⁷ Moreover, the act of reducing verbal agreements to paper had always been considered an indispensable evidence of good faith in any kind of business dealing.

The steel masters would not budge on this point until the law actually compelled them to. Thus, in order to bring industrial peace, Roosevelt established, on June 17, 1937, the Federal Steel Mediation Board. He then personally telephoned the nation's steel

¹⁶ "Siege of Steel," Business Week, I, June 12, 1937, p. 14.

¹⁷ "Labor," Time, 29, June 28, 1937, p. 12.

masters asking for their cooperation. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, appointed three men to the board, with two out of the three being heavily weighted toward CIO objectives. The members of the board included Lloyd K. Garrison, dean of the University of Wisconsin Law School and the great-grandson of the famed Abolitionist, also the first chairman of the NLRB in 1935 and considered a New Deal liberal; Edward F. McGrady, the Administration's labor conciliator, and an active figure in mediating the West Coast maritime strike; and Charles Philip Taft II, son of the late President and Chief Justice. Taft, ". . . was no New Dealer of the Rooseveltian stripe, but a socially-conscientious progressive known to view old-fashioned strong-arm methods by management with as much alarm as he might feel about Labor's new truculence."¹⁸ Taft accepted the appointment as chairman of the Mediation Board after informing Secretary Perkins that his wife owned fifty shares of Youngstown Sheet and Tube stock and thirty shares of Inland Steel stock. Thus, observers rated the Board at least two to one in favor of labor.

However, the steel masters remained reluctant to sign contracts, regardless of mediation attempts, with what they termed an organization with the communistic dictates and terrorism of the CIO. Tom Girdler reportedly remarked that, "Whenever the law says I have to sign a contract and the law is properly upheld, then I'll

¹⁸ Ibid.

have to sign a contract. . . . I won't sign a contract with an irresponsible, racketeering, violent, communistic organization like the C.I.O. and until the law requires me to do so, I am not going to do it."¹⁹ But SWOC also had colorful words to hail against the steel masters. Murray stated that, "A persistent, brazen policy of intimidation has been practiced. . . . In dozens of local communities these steel barons have created armed camps where any act of violence on the part of their agents, including wholesale murder of innocent and defenseless workers, can occur with impunity and without obligation to account to the law."²⁰ Thus, tensions on both sides continued to flare putting pressure on the Mediation Board to affect some kind of a settlement rather quickly. For the moment, all hope rested with the Board.

The steel men attended the Board's first meeting, even though they felt the Board was biased against them.²¹ Eventually, the Mediation Board proposed that union recognition be determined from the outcome of an NLRB conducted election. But the steel firms refused to comply with this recommendation. Little hope remained that the Board could affect a compromise or settlement of some sort. Both sides steadfastly clung to their objectives. The fight continued as all concerned vied for public support of their cause.

¹⁹"Labor," Time, 30, July 5, 1937, p. 10.

²⁰"Labor," Time, 29, June 28, 1937, p. 12.

²¹Ibid.

The nation's steel producers continued their anti-union fight. "Driven into each other's arms by U.S. Steel's settlement, a desertion of their cause for which they have never forgiven Myron Taylor and probably never will, they were now engaged in trying to win to their side the strongest of all allies, Public Opinion."²² The steel masters already met with success in this regard in many of the nation's steel centers. In the Mahoning Valley, around Youngstown, citizens demanded law and order and defense of the right-to-work. Local governments were granted authority to increase their police force and to purchase additional equipment needed to preserve order. In other cities, steel workers were polled toward their feelings about going back to work. In many instances, the votes favored an end to the strike. With the validity of the balloting in question, the voting itself showed basic anti-strike sentiment. But, as mentioned previously, SWOC also realized the necessity of having public opinion on their side. "And Public Opinion, without the support of which no major strike is ever won, seemed to be swinging slowly, imponderably to the side of embattled steelmasters."²³

Refusing to give an inch in any direction, the nation's Little Steel producers, although unsuccessful, attempted to reopen many of their plants. Roosevelt wanted the plants to remain closed

²² Ibid., pp. 12-13.

²³ "Labor," Time, 30, July 5, 1937, p. 9.

until the Mediation Board had a chance to complete its task. In Ohio, the Governor complied with the President's wishes by sending out the state militia to preserve the status quo. "The plants stayed closed and, rare in U.S. history, the strikers greeted the arrival of troops with loud cheers."²⁴ One anti-union steel master complained about the prevailing situation. "What right has the Governor to send troops in to prevent men from working? The Governor's job is to protect men who wish to work. . . It's gotten so now that a man can't work in this country when he wants to."²⁵

The Federal Steel Mediation Board prepared to adjourn, in July, 1937, for lack of accomplishment on any major scale. At the same time, the steel masters received welcome news from many of the nation's steel cities. Since it became increasingly evident that the strikes would not be settled by mediation, the back-to-work sentiment of many steel workers forced local governments to protect their rights over the right-to-strike. Although they faced the possibility of further bloodshed and violence, steel plants around the country began opening their gates. This time, those that filed back to their jobs received the protection of the troops; ". . . now the militiamen were damned as public strike-breakers."²⁶

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 10.

Therefore, as steel workers returned to work and the Mediation Board closed up shop, SWOC faced the realities of a major defeat for the first time in their organizing campaign.

Many contemporaries attributed the success of the steel companies to a premeditated plan of action on the part of Little Steel. The tactics, previously devised by James H. Rand, Jr., were implemented to quell the 1936 strikes at Remington Rand. The so-called "Mohawk Valley Formula" was publicized by the National Association of Manufacturers. Later, the steel industry used this formula as a reference point in developing their anti-union strategy and tactics.²⁷ The Formula's methods included gaining support of the local community and its press to generate a back-to-work movement. In order to do this, they pictured the strike as revolution and the strikers as aliens and communists, while distorting the strikers side of the story in the newspaper. Thus, the local communities did not really understand what actually occurred. This proved to be an important element in getting the back-to-work movements off the ground. The anti-strike campaign also included breaking the morale of the steel workers and turning the general public against the strike--to isolate strikers from the rest of the community, then turn the community against the strikers. The attempt to demoralize the strikers themselves included spreading propaganda

²⁷ Brooks, Toil and Trouble, p. 190.

that the strike failed, that men started returning to work, and that strikers should do the same before they lost their jobs.²⁸ Moreover, company officials stimulated the organization of citizens' committees and vigilante groups and used every available force to break the picket lines and suppress demonstrations.²⁹ If this kind of action truly represented the structural plan of the Little Steel companies, it met with temporary success and SWOC had underestimated their power and influence. An NLRB investigation of Bethlehem Steel's strike at its Johnstown plant confirmed the fact that the Johnstown Citizens' Committee, ". . . was at least inspired and--at least to the extent of \$30,000--financed by the Bethlehem Steel Company as part of its campaign to break the strike."³⁰ SWOC failed to organize Inland, Republic, and Youngstown Sheet and Tube, specifically because of the concerted effort put forth by Little Steel to stop the union movement from gaining any further headway.³¹

As strike action halted and men filed back to their jobs, SWOC had a chance to review its position, strengthen its leadership

²⁸"O Little Town of Bethlehem," The Nation, 145, July 10, 1937, p. 37.

²⁹"Girdler's Counter Revolution," The New Republic, 91, July 7, 1937, p. 236. "The Steel Strike," The New Republic, 91, June 16, 1937, p. 156. "The Girdler's Choose War," The New Republic, 91, June 30, 1937, p. 207.

³⁰"For the Sake of the Record," The New Republic, 93, December 1, 1937, p. 87.

³¹Hogan, Iron and Steel Industry, Vol. III, p. 179.

and plan its next course of action. However, there was one ray of sunshine; it appeared when Inland Steel planned the opening of its East Chicago plant without a CIO agreement. Governor Maurice Townsend refused to send troops for the occasion, but he did manage to affect a compromise settlement between the CIO and Inland, ". . . at least temporarily, by getting each side to pledge certain things to him though not to each other."³² The company pledged not to discriminate between strikers and non-strikers as the men returned to work. Van A. Bittner remarked: "For God's sake don't let anything interfere! We've obtained a very fine settlement."³³ An informal truce between SWOC and Youngstown also occurred. The company changed a few of its policies regarding vacations and SWOC called off its pickets. There seemed no other choice for the steel union, except to sit back and wait for the results of the NLRB case filed against Inland Steel regarding the question of signed contracts.

SWOC publicly refused to claim defeat, even though this was obvious to all concerned. However, it was also certain that Little Steel had not heard the last of SWOC. "From now on the strike will become a campaign of attrition--to harass the companies at every step with the hope of raising the cost of making steel to a point where any settlement would seem sweet."³⁴

³²"Labor," Time, 30, July 12, 1937, p. 18.

³³Ibid.

³⁴"Labor," Time, 30, July 19, 1937, p. 15.

Another dimension was added to the existing bleak outlook regarding any immediate progress toward SWOC's main objectives. This time it was economic in nature. An economic recession, in May, 1937, posed another obstacle to the organizing campaign. The recession made the Little Steel companies harden their defenses against the advance of unionism even further.³⁵

In December, steel output declined seventy per cent from the August rate, payrolls were almost cut in half and unemployment rose. The union estimated that 224,000 steel and allied workers were laid off and that only a small number of those still employed worked full time.³⁶ Consequently, union membership sagged and dues collection suffered. However, SWOC aided its members as best they could throughout the impending crisis and thus produced for themselves a loyal organization. At SWOC's first national convention in December, 1937, Lewis stated:

The time has come when labor must exercise its rights to organize. If labor is content to let things drift, we will drift to a crash--to an economic and financial crash--that will involve the political government of America and bring to America. . . the same sort of fascist control that you can look about you and see flourishing in the world today, . . . That is the form of government that many of our great financial and industrial leaders secretly hope will be brought about. ³⁷

³⁵ Brooks, Toil and Trouble, pp. 189-190.

³⁶ "Labor," Time, 30, December 27, 1937, p. 11.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

Although he used strong and unfounded accusations, Lewis obviously tried to sustain the impetus needed to organize the nation's mass production industries in the face of ever increasing problems and obstacles. But, with defeat in the 1937 Little Steel strike and worsening economic conditions, both SWOC and the CIO lost, at least for the time being, the momentum of 1936 and 1937.³⁸

The economic recession further irritated the situation when, in February, 1938, executives of U.S. Steel and the general staff of SWOC met to negotiate a new contract. The effects of the on-going recession and the realities of it forced the union to yield ground in formulating its new agreement. All the basic provisions of the first contract remained--seniority, paid vacations, a basic five-dollar a day minimum wage, a forty-hour week with time-and-a-half for overtime. However, something different was added to the agreement--an escape clause. Instead of running for a full year, the contract could be reopened on ten days' notice by either side, and if no agreement was reached within the next twenty days, the contract would lapse. In effect, this meant that U.S. Steel could initiate a wage cut whether or not the union agreed to it. Under the old contract, a straight one-year agreement, wages could not be cut during the life of the document. Lewis tried to remain optimistic about the arrangement while pointing to the preservation of the current wage structure; ". . . the fact that our minds were able to

³⁸ Brooks, Toil and Trouble, p. 192.

meet on questions of principle and policy is a tribute to Mr. Taylor not only as a leader of industry but as an American devoted to the furtherance of rational relationships and national stability."³⁹

The recession lasted through 1938, and the first seven months of 1939, but was followed by the start of the World War II boom. The boom eventually enabled the steel union to strengthen its lodges, expand its membership drive and reinstate those forced to drop out because of the state of the economy. But until this time, SWOC relied on its old friend, the NLRB, to at least maintain and maybe even strengthen its position.

Throughout the ensuing years, 1938-1940, the NLRB made important verdicts that affected the growth and eventual success of SWOC. The Board rescued the union from total inactivity and progress on the labor front. One contemporary news magazine stated in an article:

If steel labor history repeated itself, this defeat (the 1937 Little Steel strike) should have settled the labor problems of Mr. Girdler and his friends for a decade or two. But, until recently, labor history never knew an unassuming lawyer named J. Warren Madden and the National Labor Relations Board over which he efficiently resides. Last week, what S.W.O.C. lost on the picket lines it was retrieving through the NLRB. 40

³⁹"Labor," Time, 31, February 21, 1938, p. 22.

⁴⁰"Labor," Time, 31, April 18, 1938, p. 18.

The article referred to the resolution of two cases filed against the Republic and Inland Steel firms. The Board's Inland decision held that an employer must be willing to reduce an oral agreement to writing, after collective bargaining with employees' representatives and that Inland's assertion of unwillingness to do so constituted a violation of the National Labor Relations Act. Finally, the loophole in the Wagner Act, found by the steel independents and used by them to support their resistance to unionism, was closed. Moreover, the Board ordered Inland to stop recognizing their company union and to bargain with SWOC.

The NLRB also found Republic in flagrant violation of the Labor Act. Referring to the strike last July in Ohio, they found the company responsible for causing the strike; the charges also included: open sponsorship of company unions, discriminatory discharges of union members, espionage, terrorism, incitement of violence, and responsibility for an unprovoked attack on strikers resulting in death and injury to strikers, sympathizers and innocent bystanders. The NLRB ordered the corporation to stop interfering with the self-organization of its workers, to dissolve its company union and to reinstate with back pay some estimated 5,000 workers who went on strike and those dismissed previous to the strike for union activities. This case showed how the steel companies had prevented their employees from organizing into outside unions. Tom Girdler

⁴¹"The National Labor Relations Board," The New Republic, 94, April 20, 1938, p. 316.

described various parts of the decision as "startling" and "astounding" and promised to ". . . take full advantage of all rights . . . under the law."⁴²

The NLRB made another important decision that eventually effected the conditions and circumstances surrounding the next phase of SWOC's drive, in 1941, aimed at the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. The Board, in August, 1939, ordered Bethlehem to dissolve its employee representation plan because of company domination.⁴³ Moreover, the order stipulated that Bethlehem should end its longstanding opposition to SWOC's campaign. "Ominously S.W.O.C. voted its officers full power to take any action necessary if Bethlehem did not hurry up and comply."⁴⁴ However, the company refused to implement the NLRB's order; instead, they appealed the decision to a higher court. This action only served to irritate the situation even further. SWOC perceived the company's actions as a flagrant disregard of federal law and SWOC used this as ammunition in their later struggle with the company.

SWOC revised their organizing strategy based on the prevailing historical situation. This time they included an attempt to capitalize on the war preparedness issue. As the Defense Depart-

⁴²"Labor," Time, 31, April 18, 1938, p. 19.

⁴³ See pp. 81-82 for more information about the National Labor Relations Board.

⁴⁴"F.D.R.'s Dilemma," Time, 36, October 14, 1940, p. 30.

ment's armament program intensified, SWOC increasingly put pressure on the federal government to insure the continued security of labor's rights. Consequently, the government promised to do so by demanding that, "All work carried on as part of the defense program should comply with Federal statutory provisions affecting labor . . .,"⁴⁵ or no contracts would be established. Murray reminded the public and the government that in the last World War, Bethlehem Steel did not maintain its arms quota because of labor disputes resulting in strikes.⁴⁶ Murray warned of the possible recurrence of the same situation if labor's demands remained unsettled; "Total war means total defense. This is possible only with the full cooperation and participation of labor. . . . Labor demands that industry get on with the job by getting on with labor."⁴⁷ The war preparedness issue continued to plague the nation and the struggle over who should make more concessions--labor or management--remained at the center of the problem.

At a second national convention, in May, 1940, SWOC prepared for renewing its drive. Union leaders resolved to complete their organization of the steel industry within the next two years. They also stressed their more ultimate goal of making SWOC

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶"C.I.O. Faces Defense," Time, 37, January 27, 1941, p. 17.

⁴⁷Ibid.

into an autonomous international union, somewhat similar to that of the United Mine Workers. In order to reach their objectives, the union laid down their strategic plans which again included their preference for negotiations and NLRB action. However, SWOC continued to reserve the right-to-strike as a last resort when and if all else failed.⁴⁸

SWOC regained strength and confidence during the years after the Little Steel strike of 1937 and the economic recession that followed. This and other factors enabled them to forge ahead toward their goals and renew their organizing struggle aimed at America's independent steel producers. The economic boom created by the Defense Department's rearmament program and specific NLRB decisions made in the union's favor, made the road ahead look a lot brighter. SWOC's next major effort would prove decisive.

⁴⁸"S.W.O.C. Launches National Drive," Business Week, I, May 18, 1940, pp. 30-31.

Chapter IV

Bethlehem's Employee Representation Plan

The next crucial phase of SWOC's organizing drive began in 1941 when they launched an all-out campaign against Bethlehem Steel.¹ In doing so, the union took on a decisive challenge. Bethlehem's company union had been firmly entrenched for many years and it enjoyed loyalty and support from the company. SWOC had to devote considerable time and effort in order to discredit and eventually destroy Bethlehem's ERP. The company took pride in its system of employee representation and would do almost anything to keep it functioning. However, Murray had a totally different view of the ERP. "Never was a more damnable racket perpetrated in the history of American business. It is corrupt and unhealthy. It constitutes the same kind of law violation as a white slave act violation would."² Regardless of what Murray thought, Bethlehem's company union survived for a relatively long time during which it managed to gain the support of many workers.

By 1920, Bethlehem Steel had successfully implemented ERP's at all its plants; it was one of the first American steel

¹See Chapter VI for further discussion of SWOC's organizing drive aimed at the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, in 1941.

²The Bethlehem Globe Times, 22 March 1937, p. 4.

companies to do so. Plagued by a series of strikes in 1918, the company followed the suggestions of the National War Labor Board and created a system of employee representation which began operating on October 1, 1918. However, the jurisdiction of this particular plan included all plants except the main one located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

At the main plant, a special Bethlehem Plan was installed. Moreover, a War Labor Board examiner was sent in to supervise its formation and implementation. Initially, the Board had intervened to investigate the cause of labor disputes there and to bring about a settlement if possible. A Presidential proclamation, issued on April 9, 1918, allowed the War Labor Board to move in if strikes or other problems affected the conduct of the War.³ The Board issued its findings on July 31, 1918. They claimed that workers at Bethlehem Steel had the right to collective bargaining through shop committees.

Under the direction of the War Board examiner, the company announced, on October 9, 1918, its plans for the creation of shop committees. In October and November of that year, the elections of committeemen took place throughout the various shops under the watchful eyes of the examiner. The actual voting occurred during regular working hours with the booths and ballot boxes supplied by

³ Hogan, Iron and Steel Industry, Vol. III, p. 864.

the company. Fifteen days prior to the event, a notice appeared in each shop informing workers about the upcoming election. The examiner determined that only workers in the employ of Bethlehem prior to August 31, 1918, were eligible to vote.⁴

After this was completed, the War Board instructed Bethlehem to negotiate with the newly elected representatives and to agree upon a mutually satisfactory plan of collective bargaining. Finally, they came to terms and on May 1, 1919, the Bethlehem Plan went into operation. That summer, the company distributed a pamphlet to its employees describing the actual details of the plan. However, a series of revisions were made and the final version of the plan was announced on January 28, 1920. Ultimately, the Bethlehem Plan, after all the revisions were made and the War Labor Board was no longer in existence, closely resembled those plans initiated by the company at their other plants.⁵

The plans, in essence, created to represent the workers, to secure and protect their rights, to handle their grievances, and to open a line of communication between labor and management that would promote understanding and hopefully prevent further disputes, supposedly, gave workers a means of collective bargaining with the company. Whether the FRP would actually accomplish these things,

⁴ United States National Labor Relations Board, Decisions and Orders of the National Labor Relations Board (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1940), Vol. XIV, p. 556.

⁵ Ibid., p. 558.

remained to be seen. Regardless of the outcome, Bethlehem developed the plans and set them in motion.

Bethlehem's plan divided employees into groups determined by their specific departments. One employee representative existed for every one-hundred employees or major fraction thereof. Elections of officers and representatives took place annually. Employees voted twice: once for nomination and again for the election of representatives from among the nominees. Workers voted by secret ballot during their regular working hours. Any man employed by the company for sixty days or more was eligible to vote.

However, in order to qualify for nomination as an employee representative, one had to be on the company payroll at least one full year prior to the first day nominations occurred, at least twenty-one years of age and an American citizen. Moreover, the plan prevented all managerial or supervisory staff and persons not employed by the firm from serving as representatives. Elected representatives served a term of one year which usually began in March. Prior to 1937, the company compensated representatives for the time they spent attending general meetings; usually at the rate they ordinarily received for their regular work in the plant.⁶

The plan called for the existence of a general body, with officers consisting of a chairman, vice-chairman and secretary, elected by that same body. There were also two sets of committees:

⁶ Ibid., p. 580.

a standing committee, made up of employee representatives; and a joint committee, formed by adding to the standing committees an equivalent number of management representatives.

At the main plant, because of a large number of employee representatives, ". . . an intermediate 'works committee' was interposed between the general body and the two sets of committees."⁷ Representatives of each division of the works committee elected division representatives from their own numbers on the basis of one representative for each five-hundred employees. These division representatives usually numbered between twenty-five to thirty and constituted the works committee as distinguished from the general body of all representatives. Under the Bethlehem Plan, the works committee elected five of its members to the various standing committees which included rules, general committee, wage, safety and transportation. In this way, the Bethlehem Plan differed from all the rest. The plans at smaller plants, choose their standing committees directly from the general body of employee representatives.⁸

Bethlehem Steel's management appointed five officials to the standing committees which they later enlarged and called the joint committee. In the joint committee, a company official usually stood as the chairman and an employee, the secretary. The joint

⁷Hogan, Iron and Steel Industry, Vol. III, p. 867.

⁸Ibid.

committee held meetings every two months while the corresponding standing committee met on alternate months. The works committee and the general body alternated similarly.⁹

Under the plan, foremen heard grievances first. From there on, appeals went to department supervisors, to division supervisors and then to a management representative or to a joint committee. Decisions could be appealed to the joint committee on appeals who reviewed the case, listened to both sides, conducted investigations and then voted. A decision required a majority of the membership (five from management and five from employee representatives). The possibility also existed for workers to appeal unsettled cases all the way up to the general manager and then to the president if necessary.

However, the entire appeal process at Bethlehem was rarely used. Surprisingly, most labor problems reached a settlement in the departments where they originated. Foremen and supervisors managed to settle eighty-five per cent of the cases they heard. Moreover, only five to seven per cent of the cases reached management representatives and only two per cent went further than to the joint committee.¹⁰

For the most part, Bethlehem Steel initiated and sponsored the ERP, determined its essential form and made it an integral part

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

of its business; the plan represented one of the company's most important policies.¹¹ Since the company had to agree to some kind of collective bargaining for its employees and given Bethlehem's long standing opposition to trade unionism, it is easily understood why they preferred the ERP to any outside labor organization or representative. Eugene Grace, President of Bethlehem Steel, referred to the expressed purpose and meaning of the plan when he remarked: "Peace and prosperity in industry rest upon the firm foundation of friendship and amity between employer and employee."¹² The ERP, by giving the worker a means to vocalize his grievances, was to create a certain kind of bond between labor and management; a bond that was strong enough to maintain a state of harmony and tranquility even during times of labor discontent and disappointment. Better communication between both parties along with a system for handling workers' grievances, presumably resulted in higher morale and an improvement in productive efficiency among labor.¹³ Moreover, company unionism, as an alternative to trade unionism, gave the employer a greater advantage in that all policies remained subject to his control. For example, Bethlehem Steel maintained a veto over all amendments to the plans; thus, the essential structure of

¹¹U.S. NLRB, Decisions and Orders of the Labor Board, Vol. XIV, p. 594.

¹²"Bethlehem's Labor Success," Business Week, I, May 2, 1936, p. 30.

¹³Bernstein, The Lean Years, p. 172.

the plans could not be altered without the company's consent.¹⁴

In order to familiarize the worker with his employer and to insure a constant flow of communication downward to the mass of Bethlehem's labor force, the company and the ERP began its publication of The Bethlehem Review, on April 24, 1924. This company magazine informed the steel workers about the corporation, its policies and the various plans implemented by the company union. President Grace almost always wrote the Review's cover letter and addressed his remarks directly to the employees. In an early issue, Grace expressed his desire for the further development of employee-management communication and considered the ERP an excellent means to accomplish this. "The Bethlehem Plan provides not only a definite channel through which the employees may reach the Management, but at the same time gives the Management an opportunity of presenting to the employees problems which must be considered in carrying on business."¹⁵

Basically, the company used the Review as a vehicle to express their preference of the ERP over all other forms of representation. Bethlehem took great pains to convince its employees that they were getting the best possible form of representation through their company union. The bulletin's articles praised the

¹⁴U.S. NLRE, Decisions and Orders of the Labor Board, Vol. XIV, p. 592.

¹⁵The Bethlehem Review, 7, 22 April 1925, p. 2.

ERP and continually pointed out the advantages and benefits both labor and management received from it. On the ERP's fifteenth anniversary, Grace summed up his feelings about the plan:

No outside agency could possibly take the place of our Employees' Representation Plan, without destroying that all essential direct contact and relationship so necessary to insure to employees the best possible working and living conditions, and to management the cooperation of an intelligently informed body of employees I feel it my duty to say plainly that no Bethlehem employee is required to belong to a labor union to get the full advantages of collective bargaining. . . All of these benefits of collective bargaining are afforded under our Employees' Representation Plan without cost to the employee. 16

With statements such as these, the company probably hoped to assure its labor force that they were being taken care of; their own company union would secure and protect their rights.

The ERP heard a variety of cases; many of labor's grievances came to the fore and to the attention of management. The complaints heard most often included such issues as: wages and hours, safety and sanitary conditions, housing, health and death benefits, and pensions and relief programs. Other cases involved the reinstatement of dismissed men and the implementation of technological advances--labor saving devices--in the plant. During the 1920's, the company and the ERP created a number of different programs, some of which were based on labor's expressed grievances.

¹⁶The Bethlehem Review, 25, 25 Sept. 1933, p. 1.

As one employee representative put it, "The employees will look for better labor conditions, proper safety devices, better housing, better sanitation conditions conducive to health, just compensation, and the settlement of disputes and grievances in a manner by which they can be heard and have a voice through one of their own number."¹⁷

In 1924, the company created an Employees' Saving and Stock Ownership Plan which gave workers the opportunity to purchase shares of seven-per cent cumulative preferred stock at the going market rate. Moreover, the cost of the stock was deducted from the employees pay check but payments had to be completed within a maximum of twenty-one months. After Bethlehem enacted its stock plan, they encouraged their employees to participate; they expected it to be a lucrative proposition in which both labor and business would reap the rewards. The purchase of company stock would give workers a more personal stake in helping to make the company prosper. As stock owners, they stood to benefit from their share of the company's profits. And the company would have the advantages induced from a more loyal and industrious work force.¹⁸ In addition, "Workmen with stock in the company, it is thought, are less likely to become involved in labor troubles than if they did not have a

¹⁷The Bethlehem Review, 7, 22 April 1925, p. 2.

¹⁸National Industrial Conference Board, Report of the Board, Employee Stock Purchase Plans in the United States (New York: National Industrial Conference Board, Inc., 1928), p. 126.

tangible interest in the business."¹⁹

In 1924, during the first stock offering, 19,675 employees (1/3 of all employees) applied for a total of 50,453 shares (an average of 2 1/2 shares per worker) of preferred stock at the cost of \$84.97 per share.²⁰ In 1927, during the fourth stock offering, each share cost the worker \$107; but by then, 35,000 employee stockholders had saved \$8,000,000 under the plan. Grace remarked: "Through such plans industry is approaching a new basis of ownership and understanding by which capital, management and workers are united in joint interest and purpose. This is true progress as it not only encourages greater effectiveness in work but increases security and happiness as well."²¹ However, by 1931, the price of stock had risen to \$121 per share and in 1932, the stock offering was deferred because of the bad financial situation of most employees due to the depression.²²

The company developed and instituted a Pension Plan, in 1923, to provide employees with a supplementary income and partial support after their retirement. A special committee reviewed all the applications and then sent their recommendations to a General Pension Board that had the final say over acceptances and rejections.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 127.

²⁰ The Bethlehem Review, 1, 24 April 1924, p. 2.

²¹ The Bethlehem Review, 13, 1 Feb. 1927, p. 1.

²² The Bethlehem Review, 23, 18 Feb. 1932, p. 12.

The company administered the plan, which was made effective through the ERP; employee representatives were consulted in the development and application of the system.²³ In order to qualify for pension, steel workers had to be at least sixty-five years of age and in the company's employ for twenty-five years or more. However, a special pension existed for employees totally incapacitated after fifteen years of service.²⁴ In 1923, the average yearly pension totaled \$435.84 and in 1928, it had risen to \$569.64.²⁵

The Bethlehem Review kept workers informed about the plan, how much the company paid out in pensions each year and the total number of men on the pension rolls. For example: in 1931, Bethlehem paid out \$699,503 in pensions. That same year, 366 men retired on pensions after an average service of thirty-six years and an average age of sixty-eight. At the end of 1931, there were 1,468 retirees on the pension roll. Moreover, they announced that a total of \$4,328,198 had been paid out since the plan began.²⁶

On June 1, 1926, an Employee Relief Plan was announced. The plan provided disability benefits to men with no income due to sickness or accident and death benefits to families or dependents of deceased employees. The company assumed the entire cost of the

²³The Bethlehem Review, 25, 25 Sept. 1933, p. 2.

²⁴The Bethlehem Review, 14, 6 July 1927, p. 2.

²⁵The Bethlehem Review, 20, 6 August 1929, p. 4.

²⁶The Bethlehem Review, 23, 18 Feb. 1932, p. 12.

plans organization and administration. The affairs of the plan and the administration of relief funds were handled jointly by employee and company trustees (1/2 elected employees and 1/2 management). "A significant feature of the Relief Plan is that its administration is tied up with the Employees' Representation Plan, and experience to date in the handling of cases indicated that this is a very durable arrangement."²⁷ All workers were eligible to receive benefits under the plan, however, each man had the choice of participating in it or not. Employees were placed into three different classes depending on their earnings. In Class I, employees with annual earnings of \$1,500 or less, paid a \$1.00 monthly contribution which entitled them to a sick benefit of \$10.00 per week or a total death benefit of \$500.00; in Class II, workers making \$1,500-\$2,500 paid \$1.50 a month and received an \$11.00 per week sick benefit and a \$1,000 death benefit; and in Class III, those earning more than \$2,500 a year contributed \$2.00 per month and in return got a \$12.00 per week sick benefit and a \$1,500 death benefit.²⁸ Under the plan, an employee could be reclassified upward but not downward. The period of payment to sick workers varied according to the employees length of participation in the plan and term of service with the company. However, the maximum coverage was four years.²⁹ Moreover, a totally

²⁷ The Bethlehem Review, 14, 6 July 1927, p. 2.

²⁸ The Bethlehem Review, 11, 24 April 1926, p. 2.

²⁹ The Bethlehem Review, 26, 25 July 1934, p. 4.

disabled employee, after exhausting his disability benefits, could receive, during his life-time, eighty per cent of his death benefit with the balance being paid to his beneficiary after his death.

Under this option, those in Class I received installments of \$15.00 per month; Class II, \$25.00 per month; and Class III, \$33.33 a month.³⁰

In 1932, the Review stated that the company had paid out a total of \$5,303,835.52 in sick and death benefits since the plan began and that more than ninety-eight per cent of all eligible employees elected to participate in it.³¹

The company also had a safety and accident prevention program and used the Review to educate the workers toward that goal. In a somewhat impersonal manner, they explained the advantages of reducing the number of on the job accidents through a comprehensive safety plan; ". . . there is a return to the Employer in lower costs, a return to the Employee in a physical and monetary saving, and a return to the Community through a lessening of care for the maimed and disabled."³² Workers were urged to practice individual safety and ordinary care while on the job to avoid accidents. The company did its part by offering a first aid program and by promising plant modernization whenever and wherever possible.³³ By 1927, a

³⁰ The Bethlehem Review, 11, 24 April 1926, p. 3.

³¹ The Bethlehem Review, 23, 18 Feb. 1932, p. 1.

³² The Bethlehem Review, 2, 25 June 1924, p. 1.

³³ The Bethlehem Review, 26, 25 July 1934, p. 4.

total of 8,000 Bethlehem employees had been trained in first aid.³⁴

The company conducted a survey on the number and types of accidents occurring in the plants. The study showed that half of all accidents resulted in injuries to hands or feet; largely to the ends of fingers and toes. In 1924, the Review published a chart showing the study's findings. They claimed that the major cause of accidents resulted from the handling of material, falling or tripping and falling material. However, the number of accidents³⁵ and deaths declined considerably over the years.

Because there was always room for improvement in the area of safety, the company, in 1928, announced the start of an Accident Prevention Contest. The rules stipulated that the group (or plant) that achieved the greatest percentage of reduction in time lost due to accident, during each three months' period in that year, would receive a grand prize of \$1,000 in gold. Second prize was \$500 and third was \$250. The best group at the end of the year got a trophy. The contest rules defined accident severity as the number of days lost for every one-thousand hours worked. The winning group had to show the greatest percentage of improvement in severity rate for the two previous years (1926-1927).³⁶ In 1929, the company announced the results of the contest. The Steelton group had won

³⁴The Bethlehem Review, 14, 6 July 1927, p. 3.

³⁵The Bethlehem Review, 2, 25 June 1924, p. 3.

³⁶The Bethlehem Review, 15, 3 January 1928, p. 2.

the contest for the entire year, reducing their accident severity by 52.4 per cent; the Bethlehem group finished fourth, reducing their accident severity by 46.7 per cent.³⁷ Because the contest produced such good results, the company extended it for another year.

Bethlehem conducted a survey, in 1925, to ascertain better ways of providing more homes for employees as well as aid in the financing of homes that workers wished to purchase or build. From this, the company's employee housing activities developed into a general plan. The plan was administered by a real estate organization, set up at most plants, which functioned under the general supervision of the real estate department with headquarters in Bethlehem. The plan was divided into three parts: the improvement of existing homes, the construction of new homes near the plant and aid in the purchase or erection of new homes. The real estate department advised, aided and cooperated with prospective home builders. Moreover, company built homes were sold to the employee at the actual cost of production.

Under this housing program, the worker received architectural, engineering, financial and legal advice. The employee obtained full title to the property and was under no obligation to the company as long as he kept up his monthly payments. The company even took out a life insurance policy on each home builder

³⁷The Bethlehem Review, 18, 25 January 1929, p. 2.

or purchaser during their term of indebtedness. In addition, provisions were made for paying off mortgages through monthly payments that were only a little higher than local rents.

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According to The Bethlehem Review, by 1926, the corporation had assisted 504 employees to build or buy homes valued at \$2,226,000.

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The depression of the 1930's brought an end to the development and implementation of new employee related plans and programs at Bethlehem. However, the Review continually reviewed and publicized the progress of the old plans and stressed their importance at a time of severe economic troubles. For example, the Review reported that the true value of the Relief Plan became apparent during the depression years, when its services cared for many employees and their families who might otherwise have been on public charity payrolls.⁴⁰ Moreover, workers were reminded that the company extended credits on fuel supply, rentals and other normal expenditures and deferred payments under the stock and housing plans. The company made generous claims. However, the number of employees that actually benefited from these offerings, remained unknown.

During the depression, one of the major concerns of both the company and the ERP revolved around the matter of employment.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

³⁹ The Bethlehem Review, 14, 6 July 1927, p. 3.

⁴⁰ The Bethlehem Review, 25, 25 Sept. 1933, p. 3.

Bethlehem's basic employment policy stated that employees with long service, men with families and the most responsible and efficient workers received primary consideration as the active labor force, with the available work divided among them.⁴¹ Also, the ERP developed an Emergency Employment Program that actually created jobs for needy men. This program allowed workers with special problems (large families, sickness or other abnormal circumstances) to increase their daily or weekly number of working hours. An emergency relief fund, created for this program, exceeded \$1,043,000 in wages.⁴² This fund enabled the ERP to assist 3,5000 employees that needed the additional revenue the most. Moreover, the ERP advised and aided the company in implementing this program.⁴³

In addition, Bethlehem developed a system of part-time employment and a work-sharing program as an alternative to laying off workers. "This made it possible to retain approximately 20,000 more of our employees than would have been necessary if a favored few had been kept for full time activity."⁴⁴ In addition, to avoid a massive number of terminations, the company placed some steel workers on a waiting list to be called back to work as soon as jobs became available; Bethlehem still considered these men its employees.

In May, 1936, the company created a plan that gave vacations

⁴¹ The Bethlehem Review, 26, 25 July 1934, p. 2.

⁴² The Bethlehem Review, 25, 25 Sept. 1933, p. 3.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

with pay to all eligible employees. An issue of the Review explained the purpose of the plan as such: ". . . to give employees a stated vacation time with pay, to allow for rest and recreation, and in recognition of prompt and regular attendance, and of faithful, efficient and continuous service."⁴⁵ Under the plan, workers with five years of continuous employment received one full week of vacation with pay. The amount of payment was based on an average hourly rate determined from hours worked and wages earned in the pay periods beginning and ending in the first quarter of the year.

Basically, this vacation plan represented both the first and last major accomplishment, in the way of employee related benefits, of Bethlehem and its ERP during the 1930's. The depression adversely effected the creation of new programs since the company did not want to increase its financial burdens. However, the old programs, with the exception of the stock purchase plan, continued operation. Later, Bethlehem and its company union came under a direct attack launched by SWOC and its growing number of followers. Thus, the company spent a major part of its time and effort defending itself and the legitimacy of its ERP in more ways than one.

After SWOC's creation in 1936, Bethlehem Steel found it increasingly necessary to resume an active anti-union campaign

⁴⁵ The Bethlehem Review, 29, 3 July 1936, p. 4.

on both a national and local level. They stated their full support of the views and goals expressed by the American Iron and Steel Institute advertisement which denounced the union and its objectives. Later, Bethlehem let it be known that they strongly disapproved of the SWOC-U.S. Steel agreement in 1937, and vowed to continue its anti-union fight along with the rest of Little Steel. Although the CIO's success with U.S. Steel gave them an advantage, " . . . their foes quickly mapped out a counter-offensive."⁴⁶ Part of Bethlehem's plan included a propaganda campaign aimed directly at their own work force. They used The Bethlehem Review as a tool to dissuade workers from any inclination toward outside unionism and the closed shop. Articles in the Review stressed the company's preference of the ERP, praised the plans and emphasized its accomplishments. They always pointed out the ERP's connection with the smooth implementation and equitable administration of the plans. Therefore, the company seemed to argue, or at least tried to convince its workers, that the benefits labor received were directly related to the ERP's existence. The ERP was credited with laying down the foundations of the new-found friendship between labor and management.

Grace apparently believed that the company union represented a valuable weapon in his fight against the closed shop. In the Review, he stressed the ERP's effectiveness and the im-

⁴⁶The Bethlehem Globe-Times, 6 March 1937, p. 1.

provements it made in almost every area; " . . . no question can arise between us that cannot be equitably adjusted. There have been no strife or strikes, nor loss of jobs or time, and no dues or fines."⁴⁷ Grace added that this harmonious relationship benefited everyone involved: the company, the employees and their families, and the community. However, Grace found it necessary to include a warning in his message: " . . . anything that disturbs our present condition will imperil the interests of all."⁴⁸ Despite this warning, Grace seemed convinced, or at least wanted it to appear as such, that his employees were satisfied with the ERP and its accomplishments and did not want a change. He based this conclusion on the lack of strikes and the large number of eligible employees that participated in the 1936 ERP election (96.1% voted from among the 53,847 eligible employees).⁴⁹ Therefore, Grace concluded his remarks on a somewhat paternalistic note. He promised to protect his employees from any outside organization that threatened the open shop ideal or the continuation of the ERP. "My purpose rather is to assure you that we will assist you in every way to continue the present proven method of dealing with our mutual problems, and that we will use our resources to the best of our ability to protect you and your families from interference, intimidation and coercion from

⁴⁷ The Bethlehem Review, 29, 3 July 1936, p.1.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., n. 2.

any source."⁵⁰

Not long after Grace made this statement, Bethlehem had to gather its legal and financial resources to defend itself and the ERP in court. On August 26, 1937, SWOC filed charges of unfair labor practices against the company with the NLRB. In a 1938 issue of the Review, Grace stated: "The Company is defending itself, and at a considerable expense, against what we believe to be an unfounded charge, . . . , that the Company is dominating your collective bargaining Plans."⁵¹ The Company hired Hoyt A. Moore of the law firm of Cravath, deGersdorff, Swaine and Wood to conduct its defense. However, the ERP's at all the other Bethlehem plants retained their own counsel.⁵²

In 1939, the NLRB ordered Bethlehem to stop interfering with the self-organization of its workers and to abolish the ERP. Over the years, Bethlehem had expressed pride and satisfaction regarding their role in the development and administration of specific plans implemented under their industrial relations program. Ironically, many of the same factors that made the company proud of its ERP also played an important role in the Board's decision. The NLRB pointed out specific instances of company domination and interference in the collective bargaining of its

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 1.

⁵¹ The Bethlehem Review, 32, 15 January 1938, p. 1.

⁵² Ibid., p. 7.

employees: the company initiated, sponsored and determined the essential form of the plans; the plans became an integral part of the business and represented an important policy of the company; and through company publications, employees were made aware of the company's preference for the ERP and antagonism toward other forms of representation. "By such means as these the Company insured the continuance of the effects of its original domination of and interference with the formation of the Plans."⁵³

The Board found that the actual structure and operation of the plans, ". . . rendered them peculiarly subject to the interference and influence of the employer."⁵⁴ Although employees elected their own representatives, the ERP was still incapable of functioning as a real bargaining agency for them. The plan did not designate a way for workers to formulate or communicate their demands or to instruct and control their representatives. Moreover, representatives could not be chosen from outside the company, regardless of their collective bargaining capabilities. Thus, the NLRB concluded that Bethlehem's ERP did not serve at the will of its employees nor did it represent the self-organization of the workers as stipulated under the Wagner Act.

Before the NLRB's fateful decision, the ERP flourished

⁵³ U.S. NLRB, Decisions and Orders of the Labor Board, Vol. XIV, p. 595.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

for quite some time at Bethlehem Steel. Actually, how effective was the ERP in the eyes of Bethlehem's own employees? Did the company and the ERP comprehend the needs and demands of its workforce, thus enabling them to implement effective plans? Or did the company union exist just to appease the workers, create a false atmosphere of good will and suppress any worker demands for outside unionism? If the ERP really provided for the needs of Bethlehem's employees, not just expressed them on paper, would SWOC have gained any momentum and increased their membership there? How did Bethlehem's labor force view their own company union and their representatives?

Bethlehem's employees had a chance to evaluate the effectiveness of the ERP and to participate in the democratic process of selecting their representatives; they only had to cast their ballots for the man of their choice when the elections took place. However, many steel workers had grown dissatisfied with the company union since its creation in 1919 and the beginning of SWOC's organizing drive in 1936. Some workers refused to even vote in the ERP elections. And by 1941, the pro-unionists at Bethlehem waited anxiously for the company to comply with the NLRB order to disband the ERP. These attitudes were suggestive of widespread dissatisfaction with and disappointment in the ERP.

Looking back from the 1970's, Bethlehem's pensioners expressed divergent views about the ERP and its effectiveness, but

most believed it to be "useless." Most of the pro-union people viewed the ERP with contempt because its very existence seemed to deny them the rights and privileges that an independent union could afford them. Many of the workmen interviewed supported SWOC rather than the company union for what they themselves termed "valid reasons." They agreed with the NLRB that the ERP was company dominated thus rendering it ineffective and unable to represent labor sufficiently enough to generate the desired changes and objectives. A few men even referred to the ERP, most graphically, as a "Charlie McCarthy" or "April Fool's" union; meaning that the ERP was a puppet, a fake and a joke. To these men, the company union failed to produce any satisfactory benefits or actual changes in working conditions. Moreover, they staunchly believed that the elected representatives did not adequately portray labor's attitudes and sentiments.

As one man explained about the ERP, ". . . grievances were never really listened to. You couldn't really complain. Representatives did nothing. It was like it didn't even exist."⁵⁵ Lewis Kozo, at one time an ERP representative, recalled that management representatives talked a lot during the meetings but never really solved the problems that arose. Kozo stated that, ". . . if you complained about a foreman, he got the raise and you

⁵⁵ Peter Kalman, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Mindy K. Small at United Steel Workers of America, Bethlehem, 21 July 1975.

lost your job." ⁵⁶ John Wadolney, presently a union official, felt strongly that, ". . . it was a disgrace to even call the ERP a union because it wasn't." ⁵⁷ And then there was Victor Henning who expressed pride and satisfaction that he refrained from voting in any ERP election. Henning recalled that, ". . . the first time I ever voted was for the CIO to represent the company."⁵⁸ Thus, for Henning, it took the CIO, not the ERP, to inspire and compell him to vote.

Marcus Kalasz, another retired steel worker, seemed confident that, by 1941, Bethlehem's ERP had finally reached its fateful demise. Kalasz commented that:

The union was on the way in and the ERP on the way out. A different and better union was coming and it can't [sic] be stopped. Washington and the NLRB are bigger than the company and they can't [sic] be stopped. ⁵⁹

Thus, the pro-unionists interviewed rendered the company union ineffective and felt its demise inevitable as labor pushed and shoved its way to power and respectability through industrial unionism with the backing of the federal government.

⁵⁶Lewis Kozo, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Kathy Munley, 7 April 1975.

⁵⁷John Wadolney, Hellertown, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Kathy Munley, 11 March 1975.

⁵⁸Victor Henning, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Kathy Munley, 15 April 1975.

⁵⁹Marcus Kalasz, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Mindy K. Small at United Steel Workers of America, Bethlehem, 21 July 1975.

The ERP failed to provide the security and protection the workers needed and demanded. The pro-unionists perceived the company union as a facade established to placate the workers; a plan that looked relatively worthwhile on paper to business and management but did nothing substantial for labor in actuality. Moreover, as evidenced by the previous statement made by Marcus Kalasz, many pro-union men felt secure in their evaluation and estimation of Bethlehem's ERP because of the similar attitudes expressed by and the support of the federal government and the NLRB on this issue. The continued support of the government and the obvious legitimacy that support afforded labor's cause, meant a lot to the pro-union forces and probably added quite significantly to their strength in numbers.

Ironically, many of the anti-union men involved expressed similar sentiments regarding the usefulness and effectiveness of Bethlehem's ERP. However, their observations and criticism did not seem as harsh. The anti-unionists, for the most part, agreed that the ERP was inefficient and many of its representatives incompetent and thus, failed to represent labor effectively.⁶⁰ This group also pointed out that the ERP failed to provide adequate benefits and raises for the workers. Only two of the men interviewed,⁶¹ Harvey Hoffert and Michael Kendzierski, participated in the com-

⁶⁰ Harvey Hoffert, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Mindy K. Small, 16 July 1975.

⁶¹ Interview with Harvey Hoffert and Michael Kendzierski, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Mindy K. Small, 13 August 1975.

pany's stock purchase plan which they considered a relatively good investment. They both recalled money deducted from their paychecks for the stock, however, they differed over the amount.

One man, however, found the ERP worthwhile and considered it the best means for procuring the goals and objectives inherent in the idea of unionism. William Smith, at one time an ERP representative, expressed a sense of bitterness, frustration and even sadness that the steel workers refused to give the company union a fair chance. "Change took time. It couldn't come overnight but the men didn't see this. The ERP was the workers' union."⁶² Smith firmly believed that the goals of the ERP equaled that of SWOC's and he felt it only a matter of time before the company union accomplished many of these objectives. Smith also claimed that SWOC men only wanted to strike, not work.

Another retired steel worker expressed contempt for the idea of unionism altogether, whether it was company or independently inspired.⁶³ He disapproved of and highly criticized both the ERP and the CIO, and in doing so, probably relayed the sentiments of a whole other group of anti-union workers.

William Smith failed to recognize an important point in his evaluation of that period and the tensions surrounding the ERP.

⁶² William Smith, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Steven W. Bates, 8 May 1975.

⁶³ John Check, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Mindy K. Small, 15 July, 1975.

Smith believed that his fellow workers did not give the ERP enough time to accomplish its objectives before they rendered it totally useless. However, Bethlehem's ERP began operation in 1919 and it did not encounter any viable competition or real opposition until the creation of SWOC in 1936. Before the advent of SWOC, the workers had no other alternative than to place all their faith in the company union and hope for the best. But in the final analysis, the ERP failed to produce satisfactory results; the results needed to sustain the loyalty and support of the steel workers it represented. Thus, the continued existence of the ERP was threatened by the advance of SWOC.

Chapter V

SWOC and Bethlehem's Employees

In 1941, SWOC resumed an active organizing drive. This time they decided to focus all their attention and effort around the largest of the Little Steel firms, the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. The actual organization of this company was important to SWOC for various reasons. First, SWOC could not afford another major defeat such as the one encountered in the 1937 Little Steel strike. In order to maintain sufficient morale and a constant influx of new membership, the union needed continued success or, at least, steady progress in their organizing efforts. To accomplish their ultimate objectives, it was imperative that SWOC keep up momentum and remain active. Thus, SWOC recognized the necessity of making a concerted effort in their drive against Bethlehem and, if possible, to effect an immediate settlement there. Second, an immediate agreement was important because the probability of another world war threatened to postpone labor's union struggle indefinitely. Third, regarding the war issue, public opinion might turn against labor if their activities increased and intensified at a particularly sensitive and dangerous time, a time of war preparedness. The public already had conflicting opinions on whether or not labor had the right to pre-

cipitate conflicts that might interfere with needed steel production. Last, Bethlehem Steel represented one of the staunchest anti-union companies within the Little Steel group. A victory there, SWOC thought, would certainly spread to other American steel producers because of that company's power and influence.

In order to meet the challenge of its renewed campaign, the union created a special Bethlehem Steel Organizing Committee and placed Van A. Bittner in charge of the operation. They then proceeded with an intense drive to gain new members into their ranks. By 1941, SWOC had gained considerable headway in their membership drive at Bethlehem. Obviously, as SWOC strengthened their campaign there, a decision on this matter, one way or another, weighed heavily on the minds of Bethlehem's employees. Those that actually joined SWOC mentioned a number of things that directly influenced their personal decisions. Who were these men and what were their reasons for becoming active unionists?

The idea of unionism meant different things to many people and those that supported its advancement did so for various reasons. However, the reason mentioned most often centered around the attainment of security and protection in their daily working conditions. To many steel workers the word security involved such issues as seniority, health and death benefits, decent wages, better and safer working conditions, vacations and equal representation. A number of pro-union men were convinced that these goals could only be achieved through collective action. For example, Herbert Sechler,

a machinist, believed that the union was necessary and personally not involved because, " . . . men have to stick together to get anything done; individual effort is no good."¹

A union, through collective action and group identification, would give individual workers strength and confidence in numbers. Moreover, a union would allow men to meet the day-to-day challenge of company foremen and supervisors on much more than a subordinate level. The benefits of a union, specifically those of security and protection, put the worker on a somewhat equal footing with their bosses.

Another retired steel worker, J. David Machain, described in his own words what the union ideal meant to himself and many of his fellow workers.

Union men stuck to an ideal--believed union good because man is entitled to a decent wage to provide for his family. Unless man feels free, he can't live. This is an ideal; it's good for us. We believe in giving the company a day's work for a day's pay, but the company didn't want to give it. We had an ideal and we lived for that. ²

Goals and ideals such as these existed for many of the men employed at Bethlehem Steel. SWOC represented and expressed many of the same ambitions and objectives the steel workers themselves dreamed of.

¹Herbert Sechler, Richlandtown, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Kathy Munley, 10 March 1975.

²J. David Machain, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Mindy K. Small at United Steel Workers of America, Bethlehem, 21 July 1975.

Thus, many men decided to take a chance, lay their jobs on the line and join SWOC's ranks.

To some, the idea of unionism, an old one, represented a tradition passed down from generation to generation among many steel working families. Within their individual families, some steel workers represented a second and sometimes even a third generation of employment at Bethlehem. Some men recounted stories told to them by their relatives (in most cases, fathers' or grandfathers') concerning their experiences with the company and their attitude towards unionism. In many instances, the traditional attitudes and experiences of relatives directly influenced the course of action taken by a particular steel worker, brought up in this kind of atmosphere, regarding his own union affiliations and activities.

One man, Victor Henning, started his career at Bethlehem Steel with an unusual purpose in mind. He admitted taking the job with the hope of someday getting back at the company for their harsh treatment of his father. Henning recalled the abuse his father experienced when he was laid-off from work just prior to his retirement with no pension. For Henning, his activities as a union organizer represented a perfect vehicle for seeking revenge. "It felt good that I could fight the dirty company that did this to my father."³

³ Interview with Victor Henning.

Another group of steel workers related to a totally different series of experiences during their youth which led to their pro-union sympathies. Many of these men had fathers that took active roles in previous attempts to unionize the steel industry. They expressed that this left a deep emotional imprint on their own lives and influenced their individual roles in future union drives. For example, Owen McFadden claimed he was brought up in a union family. He remembered his father's advice, "If you have to be anything, be a union man."⁴ Thus, a few of Bethlehem's employees had acquired a great deal of knowledge and experience regarding the meaning of unionism through previous exposure at a rather early age. They carried their impressions with them until circumstances forced them to define the importance of unionism to themselves. For some of these men, their only alternative was to join SWOC and work toward the unionization of Bethlehem Steel.

Other steel workers were favorably influenced toward unionism more by their own personal working experiences at Bethlehem. Many of these men mentioned that they encountered abusive treatment by company foremen and supervisors during their term of employment. They came to the realization that only an independent union of their own choosing, this time represented by SWOC, would bring a halt to this kind of behavior. On this

⁴ Owen McFadden, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Kathy Munley, 17 March 1975.

particular issue, Peter Kalman remarked that, "I was a union man because of abuse."⁵ Kalman then explained in his own words the kind of despair and frustration many steel workers experienced.

You had no rights, you couldn't say anything;
it was a continual hassle. It's like your
mother and father continually beating you.
Must I live with this all the time? I've got
to get out from under this whipping! 6

(Throughout the interview, Mr. Kalman always related his experiences and feelings by using graphic analogies such as the one above. They helped to explain the actual stress and tension many workers faced in their everyday dealings with the company and their bosses. Moreover, his vivid descriptions produced a greater awareness, at least on the part of the interviewer, of the intensity of the situation which eventually forced many steel workers into the pro-union camp). Without a union of their own choice, the workers at Bethlehem had no real protection and had to succumb to all kinds of abusive treatment for fear of losing their jobs.

A number of Bethlehem's foremen, through oppression and intimidation, made many steel workers feel totally worthless and inferior. Mitchell Schaeffer, an electric welder, recalled many instances when foremen used bad language when talking to their men. He even remembered a few incidents where foremen resorted to physical force to get the men to do what they told them to. Sometimes, they

⁵ Interview with Peter Kalman.

⁶ Ibid.

actually kicked the workers around to get them to work. Schaeffer then added, "It was degrading."⁷ Lewis Kozo recalled one foreman commenting something like, "dogs could be trained but workers can't."⁸ This kind of treatment left a deep psychological imprint on many workers, whether they experienced this themselves or watched it happening to others.

Other steel workers criticized foremen for pressuring the men to perform constantly without a let-up. One man believed that this kind of attitude and behavior made many of his fellow workers bitter. Francis Vadasz recalled some foremen being "rough" and "tough," driving some men hard, while showing favoritism to others by giving them easier jobs and lighter work loads.⁹ These actions alienated a large part of Bethlehem's labor force and made many men hostile toward the company and their bosses. Ultimately, this forced many steel workers into the pro-union camp and into active unionist positions.

It is important to note why these men tended to tolerate their situation rather than quit and seek employment elsewhere. For the most part, Bethlehem Steel represented the only major source of employment in the area and many men only felt qualified doing

⁷ Mitchell Schaeffer, Allentown, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Kathy Munley, 16 April 1975.

⁸ Interview with Lewis Kozo.

⁹ Francis Vadasz, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Kathy Munley, 17 March 1975.

that particular kind of work. But mostly, the men just mentioned the responsibility to feed and clothe their families as the prime reason for putting up with mistreatment and abuse from their bosses and the frustration and dissatisfaction resulting from it. One retired steel worker described the situation rather graphically.

The job was like pulling teeth. You get up in the morning and have a toothache. You hated to go to work because of the abuse you were subjected to. Someone beating you on the back all the time but you had to do it because of family responsibilities. 10

For many of these men, the union represented a positive force; it offered a way out of their dilemma. A union allowed them to stand up for their rights without fear of losing their jobs; again, through collective action and group identification, individual workers gained the necessary strength and confidence to continue working in a hostile environment. After joining SWOC and fighting for a cause they believed in, many workers regained their self-confidence and pride which enabled them to meet the day-to-day challenge of their bosses on much more than a subordinate level. Moreover, a union meant that they would have a larger more powerful organization to continue to protect and secure their rights in the future, regardless of the prevailing economic or political atmosphere.

More specifically, many pro-unionists expounded on the kind of hardships they faced in their daily working experience or

¹⁰ Interview with Peter Kalman.

else they recalled the burdens of others. Basically, the problems discussed most often centered around the difficulty they encountered in just communicating or getting along with their foremen. This created an antagonistic atmosphere which forced some men to change jobs or departments several times. John Wadolney, a machinist, recalled workers being either threatened or fired for just smoking a cigarette.¹¹ Other men cited the same incidence and felt the punishment rather drastic for, what they considered, a minor infraction. However, most of them concluded that it was just one example of the typical absurd policies carried out by certain malevolent foremen.

Peter Kalman, also a machinist, believed he experienced prejudicial treatment because of his political affiliations. Specifically, Kalman recalled, this occurred during the 1936 Presidential election when he supported Roosevelt over Alfred Landon. Kalman's foreman questioned him about his politics, disagreed with the answers he received and then penalized him, a week off with no pay, for it. Kalman stated that all his dealings with foremen created a lot of difficulty and unnecessary problems; they could never get along. He also mentioned that foremen always assigned him the worst jobs available and many times his bosses held him responsible for the mistakes of others.¹²

¹¹ Interview with John Wadolney.

¹² Interview with Peter Kalman.

Other steel workers had similar experiences with their foremen. J. David Machain, a crane man, liked his job for the most part but complained about being forced at times to do the work of others when they made mistakes. Marcus Kalasz was told to work the crane one afternoon, even though he had no prior technical training in how to operate it. Kalasz refused because of the obvious danger involved and the next day he received a penalty of a day off with no pay. Thus, all these men encountered abusive treatment from their bosses which helped shape their pro-union attitudes and their eventual active roles as union organizers.

The men holding pro-union sympathies blamed the company and its policies for forcing the union issue on many of its employees. Company policy forced men into active unionist positions; "forced it down their throats,"¹³ as one man put it. The workers cited several specific abuses in this regard. First, the company's hiring practices seemed, at times, unreasonable and unfair. Friends and relatives of men in high places (men with the power and position to effect such decisions) got jobs while others stood outside the gates for months just waiting for work.

Another man expressed his resentment toward the company's hiring practices in somewhat exaggerated and fictitious terms. "Bethlehem Steel was small and smug. It was a Pennsylvania Dutch

¹³
Ibid.

town. They hired only farmers and rural people. It was an easy set up for the company; always had a work force."¹⁴ This statement revealed an animosity toward Pennsylvania Dutch workers that was also expressed by others during interview sessions. As they explained it, the Pennsylvania Dutch seemed to gain employment at Bethlehem more readily than any other group. Many pro-unionists explained their observations regarding this matter by pointing out that most Pennsylvania Dutch were farmers. Therefore, they had easy access to such things as chickens and vegetables which could be used to bribe foremen for jobs. In addition, the Dutch tended to remain staunch anti-unionists throughout the organizing struggle at Bethlehem. Thus, the favoritism shown through the company's hiring practices affected the attitudes of some men toward the company itself and ultimately influenced their feelings toward the union.

Second, complaints centered around the practices of company foremen. In this category, however, most union men recalled that dishonest foremen took bribes of food, cigarettes and money in return for better jobs, especially during the depression period. Peter Kalman, along with many others, remembered that foremen gave good jobs to their "buddies."

However, a few men did recognize that foremen also had problems because of pressures placed on them by their superiors

¹⁴
Ibid.

to produce. They believed that this is what actually caused foremen to be rough at times on their men. Mitchell Schaeffer commented on this issue that, ". . . they feared for their jobs too. They had to produce so they pushed the men. There were other men always waiting to get their jobs."¹⁵ However, many workers refused to grant concessions to foremen even on these grounds. They strongly believed that there was absolutely no excuse for their behavior.

Third, dangerous working conditions, low wages, long hours and virtually no benefits or protection for the workman created a tense and hostile environment. Men reported working under either very hot or cold weather conditions and they recalled some men passing out from the intense heat caused by the process of steel production itself. Others remarked about the poor sanitary conditions with few showers or bathrooms and no specifically designated area to eat lunch. According to the pro-unionists interviewed, the company seemingly had no intention whatsoever of changing these unfair practices and unsafe conditions; a problem that had plagued labor constantly since the dawn of the industrial revolution. This kind of realization, along with each individual's daily working experience, pushed many of Bethlehem's employees further and further into the pro-union camp.

Those that sided with the union and eventually joined SWOC's ranks did so with the expressed purpose of gaining for

¹⁵ Interview with Mitchell Schaeffer.

themselves and others like them the security and protection needed while working in the plant. Their daily working experiences and their relationships with their bosses and the company itself forced them to seek external means to achieve their desired objectives. To them, SWOC seemed the only answer available at that time. Therefore, these men joined up and became active organizers in the fight for union recognition.

Of those interviewed, most joined SWOC around 1937 and became organizers shortly thereafter. Victor Henning showed pride in the fact that he was the thirteenth man to join SWOC in Bethlehem and that he distinguished himself by signing up more new members in one day, thirty-seven, than any other union organizer.¹⁶ The organizers had various jobs to perform for the union. Their duties ranged from signing up new members and collecting one dollar in dues from each new person joining, to handing out leaflets outside the plant gates as workmen changed shifts. Besides their regular jobs, their daily union activities kept these men relatively busy.

In many instances, active organizing on company property proved dangerous since Bethlehem had forbidden such action. As one retired organizer and steel worker put it, ". . . if they caught you, they discharged you. If you were a union man they'd find some way to get rid of you."¹⁷ Many times union meetings had

¹⁶ Interview with Victor Henning.

¹⁷ Nicholas Kiak, Hellertown, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Kathy Munley, 2 April 1975.

to be held in secret places, such as the homes and cellars of union members. Basically, most of the pro-SWOC men feared being fired if they gained reputations as unionists. Some organizers recalled making contacts with individual steel workers before and after shifts and many times in plant washrooms or during lunch breaks. Moreover, most men refrained from wearing SWOC and CIO identification buttons and badges for fear of being reprimanded or even fired. There were some, however, like Marcus Kalasz, who openly defied the company's anti-union policies and proudly displayed their CIO buttons while on company property.

SWOC's organizing strategy included going door-to-door to convince, what they termed, "middle-of-the-roaders" to join the union. In addition, the local union held mass meetings, picnics and rallies for the purpose of organizing and increasing SWOC's membership. One retired steel worker and organizer, Francis Vadasz, recalled never being at home because he constantly attended union meetings and events. Vadasz continued that, ". . . wives of organizers were called CIO widows,"¹⁸ because their husbands were very rarely at home.

Many of SWOC's known organizers at Bethlehem encountered threats and/or punishment from foremen or supervisors because of their union affiliations and activities. As they recalled, the company tried to coerce some men to drop out of the union, ". . . but

¹⁸ Interview with Francis Vadasz.

we hung on,"¹⁹ said Owen McFadden. Some workers received penalties (usually time off with no pay) and still others faced more difficult or tedious jobs. The company even discharged some men entirely or for an unspecified period of time for their union ties. Two men interviewed were actually fired from the company and both mentioned being "blackballed" and unable to obtain similar work anywhere else. One man was eventually rehired, however, the other worker was not as successful.²⁰

Many pro-unionists never faced threats or punishments themselves but recalled others that did. Some supervisors called known union men into the office every day to reprimand them and tried to dissuade them from continuing their union activities. Many times, foremen resorted to name calling, threats and bribes in order to produce the results they wanted. They referred to the CIO and SWOC as a bunch of "gangsters." In some cases, supervisors actually told men to get out of the union or they would find themselves in deep trouble. Marcus Kalasz recalled a rather strange experience he encountered. On his way home from work one night, he was followed by, what he termed, ". . . gangsters hired by the company."²¹ Kalasz believed that the purpose behind this action was obvious. The company hoped to scare and intimidate him right out of

¹⁹ Interview with Owen McFadden.

²⁰ Interview with Peter Kalman and Victor Henning.

²¹ Interview with Marcus Kalasz.

the union. Another retired steel worker was offered a more positive reinforcement. His boss hoped to bribe him with a promotion to foreman. However, the terms of the offering were the same as usual; he had to give up all his union and organizing activities. The anti-union tactics of Bethlehem Steel were so intense that even some pro-union immigrant employees of the company stated that they experienced more prejudicial treatment because of their union affiliations and organizing activities than as foreigners. However, according to the men interviewed, the company's methods failed to bring the desired results. At least all the men involved in this study, refused the company's offers and ignored, as best they could, their harassments.

Surprisingly, many of the pro-unionists interviewed had no animosity toward Bethlehem Steel and retained many pleasant memories about their employment there. As James Dugan put it, "Bethlehem Steel took care of me when I got sick . . . and I made a good living there."²² Dugan then added a critical comment about the firm; ". . . the company made too much money and the workers not enough. It should have been more evenly distributed."²³ Louis Goldberg, a pro-union man, but one that was hired after the union question was resolved, stated that, "The company was good to me and

²² James Dugan, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Kathy Kane, 3 March 1975.

²³ Ibid.

I had an obligation to them. It was the greatest industry and
fair with its men."²⁴

Many of the steel workers agreed that their jobs at Bethlehem enabled them to obtain the material pleasures they wanted most out of life. The ones mentioned most often included homes, cars and higher education for their children. Nicholas Kiak believed that the company never really bothered him or gave him any trouble in any way, ". . . even as a union man."²⁵ However, Kiak, in analyzing company policy, believed Bethlehem made a mistake by waiting too long to implement specific benefits and reforms, ". . . otherwise, they might have defeated the union."²⁶

However, other pro-union men remained hostile to the company right up until the present. Peter Kalman was one of these men. He resented the company's flagrant violation of the law. "The company violated the Wagner Act. They didn't care about the law. They dictated their own policies."²⁷ Marcus Kalasz agreed with Kalman's assessment and added that, "A lot of crooked things went on. They didn't care if you starved to death. The men were treated bad. The Company cut prices of jobs, never raised them.

²⁴ Louis Goldberg, Hellertown, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Mindy K. Small, 14 August 1975.

²⁵ Interview with Nicholas Kiak.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Interview with Peter Kalman.

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You have to fight like hell for a penny, ~~one~~ rusty penny."

All of the pro-union men interviewed refused to give up their role in SWOC's organizing campaign. They all demonstrated great pride and satisfaction in what they finally participated in accomplishing--the unionization of one of America's staunchest anti-union steel corporations, Bethlehem Steel. Their dissatisfactions with existing conditions, their desire to bring about immediate and effective change without waiting for the firm to do so on its own, and their prior influences and backgrounds related to unionism led these men toward collective action in order to successfully execute their objectives.

All of Bethlehem's employees felt the effects of SWOC's organizing campaign in one way or another. The attitudes and reactions of individual steel workers regarding the union question, however, varied greatly. Many workers staunchly opposed SWOC, refused to join its ranks and voiced their defiance to the union's organizing campaign. However, the interviews conducted with anti-union men revealed some irony in the whole affair. It was not that they objected to the union's ideals of protection and security, better and safer working conditions, higher wages and improved benefits. In fact, most of these men expressed the exact same goals and desires. Their major complaint, however, centered around the scare tactics practiced by the union organizers in attracting

²⁸ Interview with Marcus Kalasz.

new membership, the implementing of strikes and demonstrations to bring about union recognition, and the violence and destruction that usually accompanied them.

Moreover, many of the anti-unionists blamed the violence and destruction that developed during the strike periods on outside agitators or radicals brought in by the union for that expressed purpose. On this particular issue, it was difficult to determine how many of these men were actually influenced by the company's anti-union propaganda. Many of the complaints lodged against the union and its tactics, by this particular group of retired steel workers, closely resembled the same points stressed by the industry in its effort to dissuade labor from being enticed into the union movement. To what extent these anti-unionists could support their claims regarding outside agitators or reveal the source of their information, remained unanswered. However, there was no doubt that they held unyielding positions concerning their attitudes toward SWOC and the methods employed by the union to achieve their ends. Bruce Steinbecker, a precision grinder, put it bluntly when he stated, "I just can't tolerate it."²⁹

Another anti-unionist, William Smith, expressed hostility toward those of his fellow workers that had taken up the union's cause and joined SWOC. Through his close observations, Smith

²⁹ Bruce Steinbecker, Emmaus, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Mindy K. Small, 16 July 1975.

lumped them all together in one group and generally concluded that union men always caused trouble and complained about everything. In his opinion, . . . " . . . they were just bums. They were the lousiest guys. They wouldn't work."³⁰

It must be mentioned that many anti-unionists had a difficult time during this period. They also experienced bitterness, frustration and antagonism at work. These feelings increased as the organizing drive intensified at Bethlehem and more of their fellow workers began to openly support SWOC. Moreover, as SWOC gained momentum and numerical strength at Bethlehem, anti-unionists were easier to identify and it became an increasingly unpopular position to hold. For example, Michael Kendzierski revealed during the interview that he eventually signed with the union out of frustration and intimidation, not from personal choice. "I didn't like the union but if you didn't sign they'd laugh at you and call you names."³¹ Thus, both pro-union and anti-union men alike faced a hostile working environment at Bethlehem Steel during SWOC's struggle for recognition. Steel workers split off into different groups according to their sentiments which created a tense and frustrating atmosphere in the plant.

Some anti-unionists concurred with the statements issued

³⁰ Interview with William Smith.

³¹ Michael Kendzierski, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Mindy K. Small, 13 August 1975.

by SWOC organizers, that in many instances workers refused to join the union for fear of losing their jobs. Thus, the company's tactics seemed as much in question by some non-union men as the union's did to others. Ironically, fear of losing one's job was one of the prime arguments listed by pro-unionists for taking just that position. Could it be that these anti-unionists had different daily experiences on the job when dealing with foremen and management? Did they encounter more tolerance and autonomy while doing their work? The pro-union elements expressed a fear of losing their jobs on a daily basis regardless of their union affiliation. However, this was not the case with the anti-union men interviewed.

Most of the anti-union men involved mentioned having a relatively good relationship with their foremen. But most important, they recalled having a reasonable amount of autonomy in their daily working activities. For the most part, they were not intimidated or made to feel inferior by their bosses. As one man put it, "no bosses ever bothered me."³² Thus, this group did not experience abusive treatment, whether it be psychological or physical in nature, throughout their term of employment at Bethlehem. Moreover, these men sincerely felt that their jobs would only be in danger if they did something the company would disapprove of; specifically, joining the union. Many anti-unionists refused to take any chances of losing their jobs because they also had the responsibility of feeding and

³²
Ibid.

clothing their families. Again, many steel workers mentioned this as an important influence on their decision to join SWOC. Why did the anti-unionists refuse to follow the same course of action? Both sides, at least on this point, seemed to have the same objective in mind.

Many anti-union men retained other objections to unionism and SWOC in particular. A few of them mentioned that they saw SWOC as an organization out for itself, not for everyone else as they claimed. One man even objected to the idea of union dues being extracted from his paycheck. Moreover, he sincerely believed that the company was headed in the same direction as the union on issues regarding benefits, wages, and working conditions. He showed confidence in Bethlehem and felt that improvements seemed forthcoming in almost every area; " . . . they weren't so rough any more."³³ Some of the other retired men in this group agreed with these conclusions.

In addition, all of the anti-union men interviewed expressed satisfaction with and gratitude toward their employer. Basically, they cited only admirable traits and qualities when they referred to Bethlehem. They truly believed it was their good fortune to obtain employment there and if the opportunity arose they would choose the same jobs again. As they explained it, the company took care of them, treated them fairly and enabled them to make a substantial living. Donald P. Johnson, a roller and later a foreman,

³³ Ibid.

remarked that, ". . . it was a nice company to work for."³⁴ Bruce Steinbecker added that, "The company doesn't cut your throat. They take care of you."³⁵ Steinbecker was satisfied with his work and the company because it allowed him to obtain the things he desired most out of life with only an eighth grade education.

Some of Bethlehem's employees managed to remain indifferent to the union question for various reasons. In this category two men and their working experiences stood out the most, Herman Schneider and George Dancho. Herman Schneider, a retired welder, loved his job tremendously. Basically, he felt free to use his ingenuity to make the job easier, safer and more efficient. He mentioned that foremen never interfered with his work and they gave him recognition for the work he accomplished. Schneider claimed that his ambition, his desire to advance, left him little time to dedicate to union activities or to associate with his fellow employees. Thus, he devoted all his time and interest to his job and refrained from any kind of union involvements. Schneider gained pride and satisfaction from his job and seemed grateful to Bethlehem for everything. He commented that if the opportunity arose or if he had it all to do over again he would still seek employment there. However, Schneider mentioned bad working conditions, low

³⁴ Donald P. Johnson, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Kathy Kane, 16 April 1975.

³⁵ Interview with Bruce Steinbecker.

wages, poor hiring practices and a few personal disappointments of his own but he trusted the company entirely when they promised improvements. But he also recognized the need for a union and approved of their goals and objectives. But for him, there was no time to get involved in such matters. Schneider's priority centered around his welding job, the creativity and pride it afforded, and the opportunity for advancement.³⁶

George Dancho hated the idea of work but worked because of family responsibilities. He claimed to be motivated only by money, yet he also refused to work so hard that he would "kill himself." He had good and bad relationships with his foremen, depending on the time, the foreman and the circumstances. Dancho also referred to poor hiring practices, an unsuccessful ERP and bad working conditions at Bethlehem. However, Dancho stood behind the company all the way. "You can't beat the Steel. If anyone says different, they are lying. They paid good and took care of you. Never bite the hand that feeds you."³⁷ He stood virtually in the middle on the union question. "The union and the Steel are both wrong but it balances out. One has to watch the other. You can't believe either the Steel or the union all of the time."³⁸ To Dancho,

³⁶ Herman Schneider, Packerton, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Mindy K. Small, 18 July 1975.

³⁷ George Dancho, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Mindy K. Small, 17 June 1975.

³⁸ Ibid.

his spare time, his time away from work and Bethlehem, seemed more important than anything else, including, his job and the union. He only wanted to enjoy life to the fullest before he died.

Thus, the men who remained indifferent to the union question were neither for or against the company or the union specifically. Their allegiance and dedication were more or less in themselves--doing whatever they could to advance their own particular goals and ambitions, different as they were, regardless of the company or the union.

One man, John Whitney, refrained from joining SWOC because he refused to be pushed into anything and he also disliked SWOC's tactics in this regard. But Whitney did not feel any devotion to the company either, only to himself. "To hell with the company and the union. I'm for myself."³⁹ Whitney expressed concern that a worker needed protection from both Bethlehem Steel and his fellow workers. For this man, his sense of individualism outweighed all other considerations.

All those interviewed, whether pro-union, anti-union or indifferent to the union struggle, testify to the actual events that took place at Bethlehem in 1941 when SWOC renewed their organizational drive there. The ongoing process of SWOC's

³⁹ John Whitney, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Kathy Kane, 23 April 1975.

drive forced the steel workers to make a more definite decision-- to take a stand either way--as to what their personal role in the larger union movement would be. Their attitudes toward both the company and the union and their daily working experiences affected their decisions tremendously. Many workers had previously joined the union during SWOC's drive between 1936-1937 at Bethlehem. Still others took their stand at a more immediate or pressing time, forced on them by specific events taking shape at Bethlehem in 1941; events that were important to the total picture of American labor history and more specifically to the unionization of the entire steel industry. The story regarding Bethlehem Steel continued and the situation there grew more intense as time progressed.

Chapter VI

SWOC and Bethlehem Steel

The federal government and the nation in general worried about potential labor strife and struggles resulting in strikes. More specifically, strikes would close down America's mass production industries at a time when uninterrupted production, especially steel production, proved vital to maintain the Defense Department's rearmament program. In a report, published in 1941, called "Labor and National Defense," Dr. Lloyd G. Reynolds, associate in political economy at Johns Hopkins University, concluded that strikes would probably increase in the near future for a number of reasons. Reynolds included in his deductions the probability of rising consumer goods prices, larger industrial profits in which labor would demand its rightful share, union organizational drives and pressure for increased production. "The industries concerned most directly with national defense were almost entirely non-union in 1917. Now they are 30 to 40 percent unionized, with aggressive organizing campaigns under way or projected in most fields."¹ The validity of Reynolds' theory, in relationship to the steel industry and more specifically to the Bethlehem Steel Corporation soon proved itself correct.

¹"Labor Pressure Rising," Time, 37, March 3, 1941, p. 17.

Trouble first erupted at Bethlehem's Lackawanna plant near Buffalo, New York. On February 28, 1941, SWOC's leaders called a strike there. The company had refused the union's repeated attempts to hold negotiations to discuss labor's grievances. The workers' major complaint centered around the wage issue. The 1940 earnings report of the five largest United States steel producers showed overwhelming evidence that steel's production and profits were booming.² Bethlehem Steel, the nation's number two producer, benefiting from defense contracts, had tremendous profits in 1940; they set an all-time record with earnings of \$48,677,524 and during the first week of February, 1941, operated at one-hundred per cent capacity.³

Bethlehem's labor problem began when no substantial wage increase followed the company's increased profits. SWOC demanded wage hikes, but Bethlehem only answered by suspending one-thousand of its employees, many of them active unionists. Therefore, SWOC called for a walk-out and, ". . . in freezing weather, Polish, Negro and native born steelworkers angrily marched in a picket line, on strike. Inside, one by one, open hearth furnaces shut down, production dwindled, came almost to a standstill."⁴

Later, SWOC presented the company with their demands for

²"Steel Upswing," Time, 37, February 10, 1941, p. 57.

³Ibid., p. 58.

⁴"Nothing Serious," Time, 37, March 10, 1941, p. 16.

settling the dispute and terminating the strike. The list included the reinstatement of workers fired over the wage disagreement and an immediate conference between the union and Bethlehem's management to discuss grievances. Moreover, the union demanded an NLRB conducted election at the plant to determine an exclusive bargaining agent along with a promise from the company that it would bargain.

The strike ended only thirty-nine hours after it started when the company finally agreed to the union's first two demands. "At the Lackawanna plant, workers accepted the terms with a whoop, convinced that the settlement was a triumph for S.W.O.C."⁵ As steel began to roll again, Bittner released a statement to the press: "This is, . . . the first time on a large scale that our union has been able to get any sort of agreement from Bethlehem."⁶

Response to the strike proved more favorable than even SWOC's leaders anticipated. Otherwise, if the strike was not at all impressive, Bethlehem would have never signed a truce, " . . . for this would have been the time to settle 'the C.I.O. problem' once and forever. Instead, the strike proved the reverse: that the corporation which has held out more fiercely than any other steel plant was vulnerable."⁷ However, most everyone involved realized that Bethlehem had not surrendered; but no one disagreed that the union acquired a notable truce.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Nation, 152, March 8, 1941, p. 270.

At that time, March, 1941, an article in Life magazine discussed the validity of the Lackawanna strike and the particularly dangerous and sensitive time in which it occurred. The article concluded that the nation could not afford stoppages in defense production, especially at a company like Bethlehem Steel which had \$1,500,000 in defense contracts and produced a large amount of heavy ordnance and armor plate steel. But the article also pointed out that, ". . . Labor can not be expected to stand by meekly while industry is booming, while profits and prices are rising, and particularly while companies like Bethlehem and Ford remain stubborn resisters to unionism and national labor laws."⁸ Although the country needed continued steel production unhampered by labor strife and struggles, many understood and empathized with labor's position and recognized the need for peaceful negotiations to achieve the desired outcome. But the stubborn resistance of many steel makers, with Bethlehem Steel at the top of the list, threatened to produce an uneasy and very much unwanted situation on the labor front.

Even though Bethlehem had just experienced a walk-out at its Lackawanna plant which could have proved disastrous, and in the end was forced to concede to two of the union's demands, the company continued to follow its staunch anti-union policies; an action that only served to anger and irritate SWOC's leaders and many of Bethlehem's employees.

⁸"Bethlehem Steel Strike," Life, 10, March 10, 1941, p. 34.

This time, trouble erupted at the main plant in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The company, over the years, had disregarded an NLRB order, of August, 1939, to disband its ERP and to end its long-standing opposition to SWOC's organizing campaign. Instead, Bethlehem appealed the Board's decision to a higher court. In March, 1941, before the appeal had been settled, the company prepared itself to hold elections of ERP representatives on company property. A statement made by an ERP representative, regarding the election, read: "We are simply exercising the rights and privileges of free American workmen."⁹

The ERP claimed to stand "one-hundred per cent" behind the defense program and against anything interfering with it, including labor strikes. Moreover, they maintained that the holding of an election was legal since the courts had not as yet upheld the NLRB findings. Thus, Bethlehem's management and its company union maintained they had the right to carry out the election process as planned.

SWOC adamantly disapproved of Bethlehem's planned election activities and perceived it as an egregious disregard of federal law. The steel union responded by threatening a strike if the elections proceeded as proposed. "As soon as our men see the ballot boxes," said Howard T. Curtiss, Bethlehem's local SWOC director, "they will stop work and strike. They are more determined than ever

⁹The Bethlehem Globe Times, 24 March 1941, p. 1.

to walk out as the zero hour approaches."¹⁰ SWOC backed up their strike threat by claiming a majority of the 24,000 men employed in the mills; even though that contradicted Bethlehem's contention that its company union controlled the support of all but four or five thousand workers.¹¹ Clarke Appoleby, SWOC's regional director in charge of the union drive to organize Bethlehem's plants, declared that, ". . . any attempt to hold the election would constitute an 'illegal election' because the National Labor Relations Board had termed the E.R.P. a company union and ordered it to disband."¹²

SWOC, following their usual strategy of infiltrating the company unions of the corporations they attempted to organize, had been angered over an amendment passed by Bethlehem's ERP to discourage just such action. The ERP's amendment provided that, ". . . membership in a rival labor organization was a bar to election as a representative under the Plan."¹³ In 1940, four employees, after receiving a majority vote as ERP representatives, were refused the position based on this new rule. However, many pro-SWOC elements claimed they succeeded in gaining control of the company union regardless of all reports to the contrary.

¹⁰
Ibid., p. 16.

¹¹
Ibid.

¹²
Ibid.

¹³
The Bethlehem Globe Times, 25 March 1941, p. 16.

A few of the retired steel workers commented on this particular issue. John Wadolnev recalled that workers who favored a "true union," a CIO union, ran for office in the ERP elections and succeeded in gaining the posts; ". . . at meetings they'd try to embarrass management."¹⁴ Victor Henning mentioned similar occurrences and reported that after infiltrating the ERP, SWOC men succeeded in converting some ERP representatives into pro-CIO men. Lewis Kozo even recalled one of the ERP's presidents becoming a "SWOC man."¹⁵

On Monday, March 24, 1941, the annual election for ERP representatives at Bethlehem's main plant proceeded as promised by the company. That same evening SWOC fulfilled their pledge by calling a walk-out. "SWOC members began filtering out of the four and a half mile long plant shortly after the strike call was issued for 5:30 P.M. to back up an earlier threat by the CIO union that its members would walk out if they found the ERP election was in progress."¹⁶

The strike continued for four days. During that period the union publicly issued their demands. This time they insisted that strikers return to their jobs without loss of seniority and that Bethlehem stop holding the ERP elections on company property immediately. SWOC's demands also required that the company abide

¹⁴ Interview with John Wadolnev.

¹⁵ Interview with Lewis Kozo.

¹⁶ The Bethlehem Globe Times, 25 March 1941, p. 12.

by the NLRB order to disband the ERP altogether. Last, the union wanted Bethlehem to agree to enter negotiations regarding a Labor Board election throughout the plant for selection of a collective bargaining agent.

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The 1941 strike at Bethlehem's main plant brought back many memories to all those interviewed (pro-unionists, anti-unionists and those that remained indifferent) regardless of the role they specifically played in the event. With a majority of the work force on strike and four days of turmoil, bitterness and violence, it was impossible for all those involved to avoid taking sides one way or the other. They all felt the effects of the on-going organizing process. Forced to make some sort of decision concerning their activities during those four days, some chose to walk-out in support of the union's cause, some chose to be strike-breakers in defiance of SWOC's actions, while still others chose to stay away from the plant entirely. This later group did so for various reasons; they either refused to get actively involved or happened to be locked-out of the plant because of circumstances created by the strike itself.

Practically all the men interviewed recalled the bitterness, frustration and violence that occurred during those four days in March. The Governor ordered all bars in the strike area

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

closed as strikers and pickets maintained a constant vigil around the plant. The men marched and carried signs that denounced the ERP and called for its demise; others carried placards calling for NLRB conducted elections to decide on an exclusive bargaining agent.

Inside the plant, strikebreakers contributed to whatever work could be accomplished under such irregular conditions. For those that remained in the plant, the company provided as best it could certain necessary comforts. The workers were supplied with food to eat and cots to sleep on. Ironically, violence first erupted at 11:00 P.M. on March 24, when strikers demolished a vending machine, used by the company to carry food into the plant for the strikebreakers.

However, throughout most of the strike, violence and destruction were evident all over. The smell of tear gas lingered in the air and mounted police roamed the streets while others continually stood guard at the plant's entrance gates. The surrounding area was scattered with overturned or demolished automobiles and shattered glass lay everywhere.

On March 25, the violence was particularly notable when mounted police charged out of the plant's main gate in order to break up the pickets and scatter their forces. One local newspaper described the incident most graphically:

Riding high on prancing horses and swinging skull-cracking riot sticks. . . . Their

appearance, like an avenging horde spewed unexpectedly from the suddenly opened main gate, caused consternation among the pickets and spectators who in a few minutes were retreating in hysterical disorder for fear of being trampled on by the horses or being injured by the large clubs. 18

A notable amount of violence ensued and injuries mounted on both sides--police and strikers, not to mention innocent bystanders. Bittner claimed that the police "provoked violence" when they tried to break up the picket lines and disperse the crowd. Bittner also blamed Bethlehem for the strike because they knowingly violated the
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law.

Many of the pro-union people that participated as strikers and pickets in March, 1941, revealed an intense dislike and even hatred for strikebreakers or, as they called them, scabs. They resented tremendously that union men put their life and career on the line for the entire work force at Bethlehem. However, strikebreakers continued to get paid, remained in the company's good graces, and if the strike succeeded, would gain the exact same benefits resulting from union recognition as the strikers would.

Owen McFadden commented about his attitudes toward strikebreakers; ". . . 'til this day I can still pick out the scabs. Scabs took this name with them to their graves. They couldn't live it down

¹⁸ The Bethlehem Globe Times, 25 March 1941, p. 12.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 30.

even though we didn't rub it in."²⁰ McFadden, along with many of his fellow workers, despised even more the men that signed union cards and joined SWOC but still participated as strikebreakers during the walk-out. McFadden recalled that pro-union men would get so frustrated that they would throw paint on the homes of noted strikebreakers. He then stated, however, that: ". . . maybe we should have taken it out on the employees instead of their homes."²¹

Nicholas Kiak recalled that both his brother and his best friend were strikebreakers and remained locked in the plant throughout the strike's entirety; he then talked about the tensions caused by the ill feelings and bitterness.²² Another man, George Dancho, remained indifferent to the on-going organizing campaign, refused to participate in the strike in any capacity, and even left town during the course of the strike. Dancho explained his feelings at the time: "I was afraid of reprisals. I didn't want to be called a scab."²³ The frustration and bitterness felt by most of Bethlehem's work force during the March strike, seemed evident by statements such as these.

The strike ended on March 28, 1941, after an all-night

²⁰ Interview with Owen McFadden.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Interview with Nicholas Kiak.

²³ Interview with George Dancho.

conference between Federal and State mediators, union leaders and management officials. The terms of the agreement stipulated that strikers could return to work without a loss of seniority, that the company would continue to meet and deal with representatives of its employees in collective bargaining, and all dealings would be without discrimination. Moreover, the company would deal with SWOC as the collective bargaining agency for its members, and it would accord SWOC equal privileges and opportunities including a mutually accepted manner of handling grievances. However, future action with reference to the selection of an exclusive bargaining agency would await final disposition of the case pending in the Court.²⁴

In the end, SWOC claimed a major victory even though they only succeeded in achieving one of their strike demands in entirety; the other three stipulations being company inspired during the negotiations. But most important, a major obstacle to SWOC's campaign reversed itself as a result of this new agreement. The steel union finally obtained a written settlement from the largest and most powerful member of the traditionally anti-union Little Steel group--the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. As one SWOC man reportedly stated, "We consider this the same as a written,²⁵ signed agreement with the Bethlehem Steel Company."

²⁴The Bethlehem Globe Times, 28 March 1941, p. 1.

²⁵Ibid.

SWOC called a victory parade to celebrate the favorable outcome of the strike. John Wadolney recalled that, ". . . when the strike was called there were only one-hundred and sixty-five paid up members. We weren't very confident. But by the parade there were 10,000."²⁶ R.A. Lewis, General Manager of the main plant, expressed a sense of relief that the strike ended rather quickly. "The efforts that were made successfully to restore and maintain order so that the men could go to and from work were an important contributing factor in the reaching of an early adjustment."²⁷

Later, in 1941, NLRB conducted elections revealed a majority of employee support for SWOC. The largest adverse vote was at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. At the main plant, 5,095 voting steel workers favored an independent union to 11,535 for the SWOC.²⁸

As SWOC expected, the success of this phase of their organizing drive, aimed at the Bethlehem Steel Corporation, spread to the remaining unorganized Little Steel companies. The steel workers employed at these firms revealed through NLRB directed elections their strong desire for an independent industrial union represented by SWOC. Therefore, the Steel Workers Organizing

²⁶ Interview with John Wadolney.

²⁷ The Bethlehem Globe Times, 28 March 1941, p. 12.

²⁸ Galenson, CIO Challenge to the AFL, p. 116.

Committee was entitled under federal law to become the exclusive collective bargaining agent at the remaining non-union American steel corporations.

In September, 1941, the Little Steel companies reversed their traditional policy of anti-unionism, recognized SWOC and began the process of collective bargaining with the steel union. However, negotiations were long and drawn out. On April 14, 1942, a settlement was finally reached between the management of these firms and the union. The agreement gave the nation's steel workers a wage increase of ten cents per hour, more liberal vacations, extra pay for holiday work and additional subsidiary benefits.

However, before the steel settlement was finalized, the United States entered the war. In order to maintain uninterrupted steel production, President Roosevelt, on January 12, 1942, established the National War Labor Board (WLB). The WLB was empowered to set wages, hours, and union conditions and through the war powers of the President it could enforce these in a final extremity by government seizure and operation of plants. The WLB defended labor's rights under the Wagner Act.

The Board arrived at a compromise on the union shop question which created considerable hostility between management and labor. It was known as the "maintenance of membership" clause. This clause stipulated that non-union members hired into a war plant were not required to join the union as a condition of employment, but members had to remain in it. Moreover, the union remained the

collective bargaining agent for the duration of the contract.

In addition, on July 16, 1942, the Board responded to the rise in the cost of living during that year with the so-called Little Steel formula. Under the Formula, steel workers across the nation obtained a 5 1/2 cents per hour wage increase; ". . . the figure being based upon a decline in their real hourly wages since January 1, 1941 plus certain other equities arising out of the requirements of the national anti-inflationary program."²⁹

In summary, the National Labor Relations Board, in 1941, certified SWOC as the collective bargaining agent for employees of four of the Little Steel corporations: Bethlehem Steel, Republic Steel, Inland Steel, and Youngstown Sheet and Tube. And by August, 1942, the four independent steel producers had signed contracts with SWOC. Finally, in September, 1942, United States Steel changed their contract and granted SWOC exclusive bargaining rights, maintenance of membership and the check-off.

Thus, SWOC had completed their major task--the successful unionization of the entire American steel industry. In 1942, the CIO dissolved the Steel Workers Organizing Committee and replaced it with the United Steel Workers of America. Frank Staffieri, who remained neutral during the entire organizing drive at Bethlehem Steel, commented that: "The United Steel Workers of America is a

²⁹
Ibid.

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good union. They take good care of you."

Many of the men employed at Bethlehem vividly recalled the fight for union recognition between 1936 and 1941, regardless of the role they played in the event. Those that actively participated in the organizing drive expressed a sense of pride and satisfaction in what they helped accomplish. But for all those employed by the nation's steel producers, regardless of their attitudes toward unionism, the ultimate achievement of the goals and objectives inherent in the idea of unionism, over the years, drastically changed the terms and conditions of their employment. Moreover, unionization upgraded the economic circumstances and changed the personal living standards of industrial steel workers. Herbert Sechler vividly described what union recognition eventually meant to himself and his fellow workers: ". . . it was the same as the sun coming up."³¹

All of the retired Bethlehem workers, including the staunchly anti-union elements, recognized and accepted willingly the benefits acquired by union recognition. When asked to point out specific advantages resulting from unionization, almost all of the men involved mentioned similar benefits. They included in their list such accomplishments as: better and safer working conditions, wages and hours; an improved, more efficient, system of

³⁰ Frank Staffieri, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, personal interview with Steven W. Bates, 19 May 1975.

³¹ Interview with Herbert Sechler.

handling grievances; unemployment compensation; health and death
benefits; pay for holidays; paid vacations; higher pension plans
and finally, job security and protection. As one man put it,
" . . . the union got the workingman a piece of the pie."³²

³² Interview with George Dancho.

Conclusion

The Steel Workers Organizing Committee, under the direction of the CIO, successfully completed their main objectives, the organization of the nation's steel workers around an independent industrial union, the United Steel Workers of America. Their organizing drive took them less than ten years to complete and they virtually brought an end to the long-standing policies of anti-unionism and the open shop; policies which the nation's steel producers had self-righteously employed over the years.

SWOC gained for themselves and the thousands of workers they represented, recognition of an independent steel union, exclusive bargaining rights at the corporations involved and the benefits and advantages inherent in the idea of unionism itself. These benefits included health insurance, paid vacations and holidays, higher pensions, and supplemental unemployment benefits. Moreover, the American steel worker gained security and protection through seniority rights and a more comprehensive and effective grievance system. Eventually, labor in general, ascended to the position of respectability among the forces of power and influence in American society.

Labor's struggle for this power and respectability had always been a difficult and many times violent and bloody one in the course of American history; the organization of the steel industry

was no exception. However, the historical circumstances surrounding the decade of the 1930's created a ripe atmosphere for labor to demand its equal share of rights and privileges in American society. This time labor had an important ally in the federal government; for the first time in American history the government projected a favorable national labor policy. The pro-labor stance of Roosevelt's New Deal and the legislation enacted by it, specifically the NIRA and the Wagner Act, aided labor's cause significantly. Basically, those Acts legitimized and made a matter of public policy labor's right to collective bargaining. Thus, labor gained a legal basis of support to forge ahead in the process of unionizing the nation's mass production industries, and in particular, the steel industry.

Over and over again, the steel union, during their organizing drive, consistently took advantage of the NLRB and its pro-labor sympathies. Whenever negotiations, strikes and all other means failed, SWOC relied on court action taken against specific steel manufacturers to bring about their desired results. Finally, through NLRB directed elections, SWOC made a convincing argument toward the attainment of their goals of union recognition and exclusive bargaining rights; at the companies involved, the steel union gained a majority of employee support and votes specifically regarding those expressed issues.

The cordial atmosphere, created by the pro-labor posture of the federal government and the formation of the CIO, forced a majority of the nation's steel workers to reevaluate their attitudes

and opinions and to stand by those convictions regarding the union question. This kind of activity, in many instances, determined the future role each individual worker would play in the union drive for recognition. Many men took a more positive stand in order to change the terms and conditions of their employment, joined SWOC's ranks and became active union organizers.

As evidenced by the study on Bethlehem Steel specifically, the men that felt compelled to become active unionists did so for very definite reasons. Generally, these men experienced greater pressure and more demands placed on them by their jobs and their bosses than many of their fellow workers did. The pro-union people involved, encountered abusive and degrading treatment from their foremen and feared losing their jobs on a day-to-day basis. This kind of behavior only forced them to seek external means in order to gain the security and protection they needed and demanded. Basically, the pro-unionists blamed the company and its policies for forcing them into the pro-union camp and active unionist roles.

For men such as these, the union represented a positive force, a way out of their dilemma. Through collective action and group identification, the union gave them the strength and confidence they needed to continue working in a hostile environment. By fighting for a cause they believed in and trusting that their objectives would eventually be achieved, many steel workers regained self-confidence and were able to meet the challenges of their jobs.

The workmen that maintained anti-unionist positions throughout SWOC's organizing campaign at Bethlehem Steel experienced a much different set of circumstances in regard to the atmosphere in which they worked. For the most part, the anti-union people interviewed claimed to have a relatively good relationship with their bosses and the company itself. Moreover, this group very rarely mentioned encountering abusive or degrading treatment from their foremen. In addition, most of them managed to attain a reasonable amount of autonomy in their jobs, sometimes even allowing for a certain sense of creativity and ingenuity in their work. Because of these particular circumstances, these men did not fear losing their jobs on a day-to-day basis as the pro-unionists did. Thus, their jobs afforded them the security and protection that pro-union men claimed to lack; and the anti-unionists believed that their jobs would only be in jeopardy if they did something to irritate and anger the company, such as joining the union. Therefore, even though these men lacked specific benefits and worked under bad conditions with low pay, they did not feel an immediate compulsion caused by real pressures and tensions to change their condition or to join the fight for union recognition.

Ironically, the anti-unionists involved did not object to the union's ideals and the benefits and advantages that would result from union recognition. But these men chose anti-unionist roles rather than remain neutral or indifferent to the union question;

they claimed to take this position because they staunchly disapproved of the tactics employed by union men to gain their objectives. The tactics mentioned most often included strikes, demonstrations, violence and intimidation. Thus, a hostile working environment existed between the pro-union and anti-union steel workers at Bethlehem.

The majority of Bethlehem's work force, along with other workers like themselves located in the nation's steel centers, felt the effects of the on-going process of SWOC's organizing campaign from 1936-1941. Sometime during that period, they all faced the problem of making a decision, one way or another, in regard to their individual role in the union's fight.

As their jobs varied, so did the departments in which they worked, the ethnic and religious composition of their fellow employees, the personalities of their foremen and their attitudes toward work in general. All of these factors influenced the men's daily on the job experiences and thus, helped shape their attitudes and opinions toward unionism.

However, those that finally joined SWOC and became active unionists directly participated in the events that eventually changed the entire course of American labor history. Moreover, they gained for themselves and others like them the benefits and advantages inherent in the idea of unionism. The effects of their successful efforts, are still experienced or encountered today in almost every facet of American life. Although labor still fights

for more benefits and increased wages, the present generation of steel workers face a totally different set of circumstances than their forebearers did. These pioneers of unionism changed the lot of the American worker and established an important place for labor in American society.

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