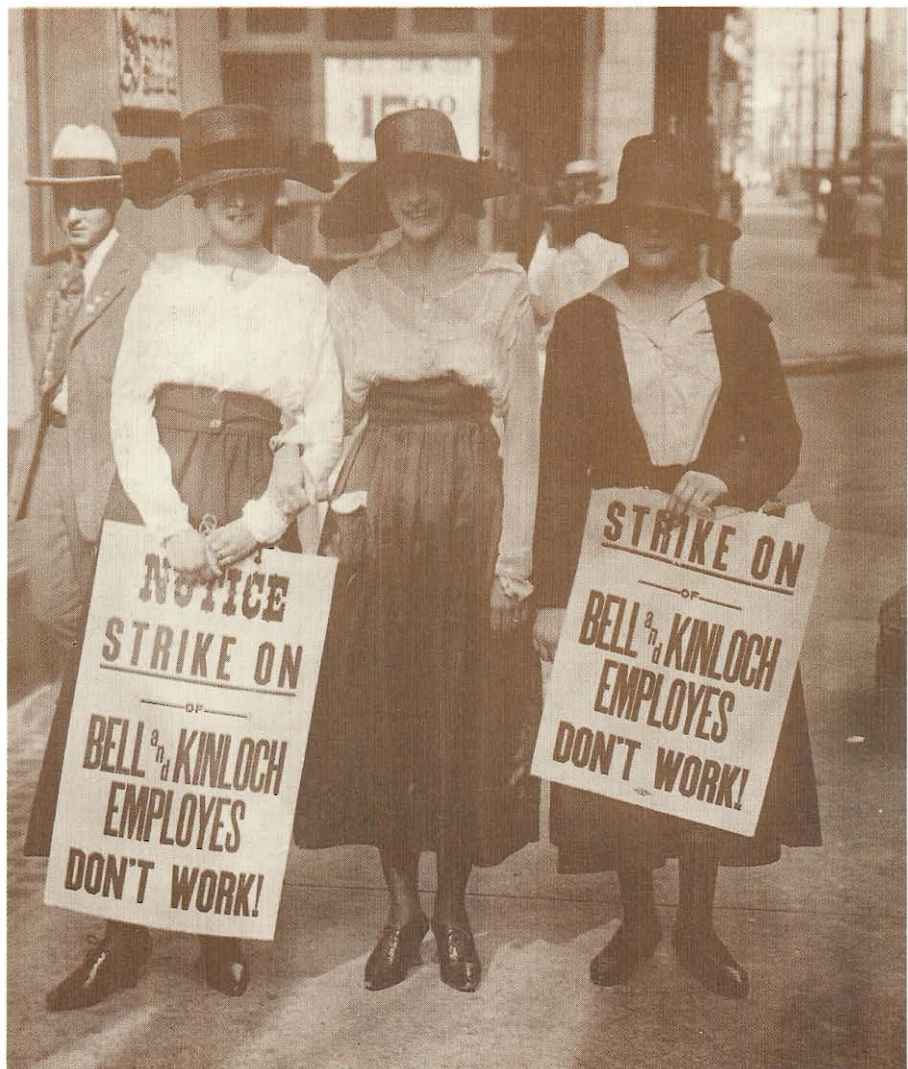

The
**St. Louis Labor
History Tour**



Edited by Rose Feurer

The St. Louis Labor History Tour

Copyright © 1994, 1996 by St. Louis Bread and Roses, Inc.

Edited by Rosemary Feurer, with contributions by Dave Roediger, Marilyn Slaughter, Lon Smith and Dina Young. [All unsigned text is Feurer's.]

This St. Louis Labor History Tour booklet was originally published in May 1994 to coincide with the first St. Louis Labor History Tour. The tour is a project of St. Louis Bread and Roses,



St. Louis
Bread and Roses



MISSOURI
HUMANITIES
COUNCIL

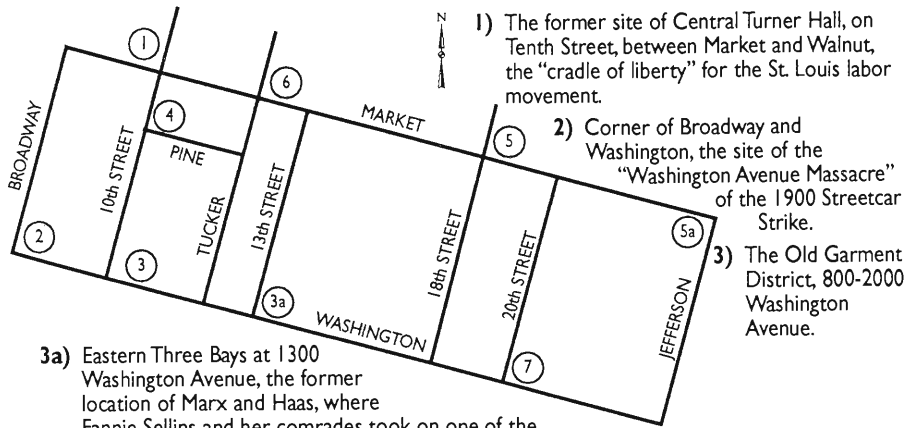
which is dedicated to promoting workers' history, art and media. The tour was developed in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council, a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Special thanks are due to the following people for their assistance in the preparation of the booklet: Gerda Ray for review; Martha Kohl for copy editing; Kevin Madden of the *St. Louis/Southern Illinois Labor Tribune* for copy editing and final review; Jim Rekart of the *St. Louis/Southern Illinois Labor Tribune* for typesetting and Howard Butler of Pelican Printing for printing.

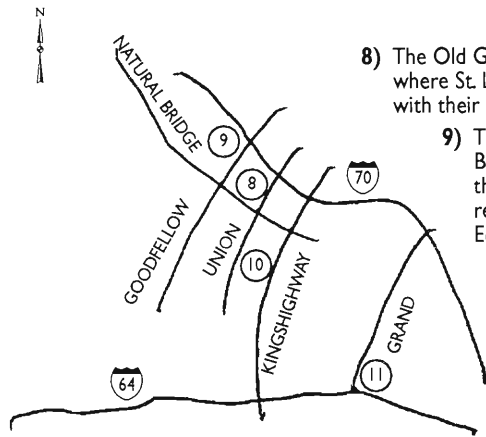
The St. Louis Labor History Tour owes thanks to the following individuals for their assistance in the development or execution of the tours: Lloyd Austin, Ron Claridge, Dennis Cutter, R. E. "Red" Davis, Pat Feilner, Susan Frederick, Yvette Goode, Gerald Hochsztein, Marian Horn, Gilbert Kamp, Winnie Lippman, Steve Maasson, Kevin Madden, Ora Lee Malone, Ruth Monteith, Lewe Moye, Tom Murray, John Pappademos, Dave Rathke, Jim Rekart, Rosie Robertson, Tecora

Rogers, Jill Ross, Larry Ross, Bernie Ryan, Abby Sullivan Shult, Marilyn Slaughter, Lon Smith, Fred Steffen, Eddie Starr, Steve Thompson, Bob Tibbs, Jr., Bob Tibbs, Sr., Roz Sherman-Voellinger, Rita Voorheis, John Webb and Dina Young.

Maps of Tour Sites



- 1) The former site of Central Turner Hall, on Tenth Street, between Market and Walnut, the "cradle of liberty" for the St. Louis labor movement.
- 2) Corner of Broadway and Washington, the site of the "Washington Avenue Massacre" of the 1900 Streetcar Strike.
- 3) The Old Garment District, 800-2000 Washington Avenue.
- 3a) Eastern Three Bays at 1300 Washington Avenue, the former location of Marx and Haas, where Fannie Sellins and her comrades took on one of the strongest garment companies in St. Louis.
- 4) Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, Tenth and Pine, where women telephone workers launched two efforts to expand the base of the labor movement.
- 5) Union Station, Eighteenth and Market, where Pullman porters attempted to organize a movement that attempted to connect economic to civil rights.
- 5a) Former site of the People's Finance Building, 11 North Jefferson, where the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters opened an organizing office. Later this would be the office where the St. Louis branch of the March on Washington Movement was organized as well (see site 9).
- 6) City Hall, southwest corner of Tucker and Market, where the unemployed protested in the 1930s.
- 7) Emerson Electric, 2018 Washington, site of the second longest sit-down strike on record.



- 8) The Old General Motors Plant, Union and Natural Bridge, where St. Louis auto workers forged a new relationship with their bosses after struggles in the 1930s.
- 9) The former U.S. Cartridge Plant, Goodfellow and Bircher, the site of the largest small arms plant in the Midwest during World War II, and the site representing the remaking of the St. Louis Economy and the St. Louis working class.
- 10) The Old Sears Building, 1408 North Kingshighway, where a small group of St. Louis workers under the National Negro Labor Council successfully pressured Sears to open up jobs to black women in the 1950s.
- 11) Teamsters Plaza, 300 South Grand, where Harold Gibbons projected his particular "progressive" style of unionism.

Introduction

In St. Louis there are many sites where workers expressed the human desire to transform their workplace and society. Most of these are unmarked and the struggles and conflicts waged there have long been forgotten.

This booklet focuses on eleven such sites, organized chronologically. Each site, we think, evokes important moments of human dreams and aspirations, of dramatic conflicts over work issues, and of challenges to organized labor to become more inclusive and to expand its vision. The issues and questions workers faced then were not unlike those workers currently confront.

Workplace concerns were often tied to a concern for their community, and also often involved a contest over the direction of the community. This can be seen for instance in the streetcar strike of 1900 (site 2), when the St. Louis elite took up arms to prevent the organization of the overworked streetcar workers. At that time the elite feared that workers' organization harbored deep challenges not only to their profits, but to their control of the community.

The tour is organized chronologically. We start with Turner Hall, known then as the "cradle of liberty" for the St. Louis labor movement. At a time when slavery and child labor marred the republic, workers who gathered there imagined a new society instead of one based on class privilege. They didn't know how history was going to turn out and what the labor movement was going to look like. They hoped the labor movement would remake the whole of society.

Workers' efforts to organize unions were only one aspect of the project that this booklet seeks to outline. Many of the struggles that took place here ended in defeat, as workers were unable to successfully contest for power. Those failures sometimes were caused by alliances forged between business and the local and federal government, but also sometimes by the failure of the house of labor to be more inclusive, to recognize the old refrain of the labor movement that "an injury to one is an injury to all."

We hope that this booklet will help you to look at St. Louis' heritage differently, and that you will carry in your memory the human drama that was lived by the people depicted here, people who fought for justice and human dignity in the workplace and in St. Louis.

Site Unseen:

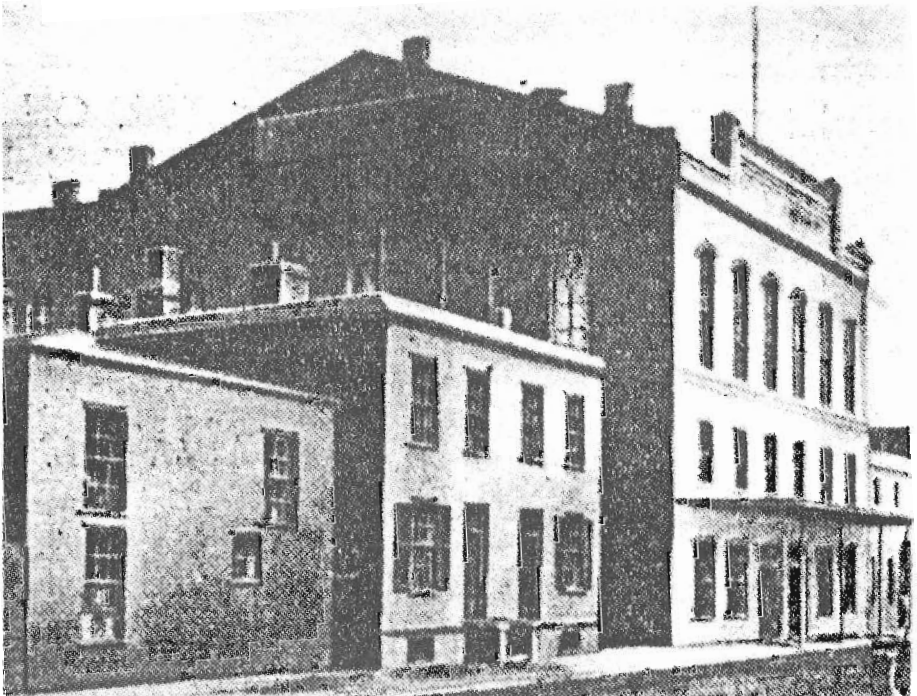
Central *Turnhalle*, May Day and the Movement of Labor

—by Dave Roediger

If this tour had occurred in 1894, the horse-drawn cart in which you would have travelled would have stopped longer in one place than in any other. That place, Central *Turnhalle* on Tenth Street, between Market and Walnut, is now long gone, and is neither marked by preservation societies nor much remarked on by historians. Nonetheless, it was arguably the most significant place in St. Louis from 1860 through 1900. It was the meeting place for the labor movement; perhaps more importantly, it was a place where the broader movements of labor — the physical strides toward jobs and freedom by working people — came together in remarkable dramas.

The Turner Society members who built Central *Turnhalle* in 1855 were part of the great migration from the German states in the 1840s and 1850s. Some fled in the wake of the failed 1848 democratic revolution, seeking in the U.S. a freedom they could not find at home. Others sailed in hopes of jobs and security. The German migrants took the promise of America seriously and frequently fretted that southern slavery disfigured the republic and limited economic opportunities. Turners, who organized around gymnastic activities and radical politics, denounced slavery with particular force.

Turners had a chance to act on their antislavery convictions because of another mass movement toward freedom, by enslaved workers themselves. Since



Central Turner Hall, Tenth street, south of Market, 1855-1932. It was often referred to as Labor's "Cradle of Liberty."

slaves often escaped their bondage and because the Compromise of 1850 called for the return to slavery of those who had fled, the 1850s saw highly dramatic and often violent clashes among bounty hunters, mobs and abolitionists. Turners developed a reputation as muscle on the antislavery side. Missouri slaves challenging bondage, figures such as Dred Scott and William Wells Brown, were not only African-American heroes but working-class heroes as well. So too were the immigrant Germans who defended them.

As the Civil War began, Missouri's pro-Confederate governor helped to place Central *Turnhalle* at the center of further drama. Setting up a Rebel-leaning military site at Camp Jackson, near the huge arsenal in St. Louis, the governor provoked federal action to defend the store of guns in the arsenal. Needing volunteers, the federal forces immediately turned to the *Turnhalle*. They could, as one historian recently put it, be sure of finding the "most fit and best armed" men there. These mostly young and working-class men were also among the most pro-Union and anti-slavery in the city. The Turner forces participated in a fully-successful attack on Camp Jackson, greatly damaging Rebel attempts to take Missouri out of the Union. But as they paraded back in victory a mob shout-

PROCLAMATION.

St. Louis, Mo., July 25th, 1877.

FELLOW-CITIZENS. The daily press of the city—both English and German—persisting in misrepresentation of our movement in the present great struggle of our fellow-workmen against the overbearing oppression of capitalists and monopolists,—we are compelled to issue the following in order to clear ourselves of the charges and abuses, which the daily press of St. Louis sees fit to throw upon us. Liberal thinking men may then judge, who is right and who is wrong.

As you all well know, work is very scarce now in all branches, and the compensation for work done is so little, to make it almost impossible for any man to make his bare living, and it is utterly impossible for married men to support their families. Where shall this end? If now, during the summer season, such is the case, what shall we do next winter? Has our government done anything for us workmen? We say No! emphatically No! Therefore, fellow-workmen, we must act ourselves, unless we want starvation to stare to our faces the coming winter. There is only one way—**Help yourself!**

To this purpose a meeting was held last night at the Lucas Market, where the following resolutions were passed!

Resolved, that we, the authorized executive committee of the Workmen's party of the United States, do not hold ourselves responsible for any act of violence which may be perpetrated during the present excitement; but that we will do all that lies in our power to aid the authorities in keeping order and preventing acts of violence, and will do our utmost to detect and bring to punishment all guilty parties. We make an issue for our constitutional rights as American citizens—that is, the right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Our motto is, "Death to thieves, incendiaries and murderers."

Resolved, that, as every man willing to perform a use to society is entitled to a living, therefore, if our present system of production and distribution fails to provide for our wants, it then becomes the duty of the government to enact such laws as will insure equal justice to all the people of the nation.

Resolved, that, as the condition of an immense number of people now in forced idleness, and the great suffering for the necessities of life caused by the monopoly in the hands of capitalists, appeals strongly to all industrial classes for prompt action, therefore, to avoid bloodshed or violence, we recommend a general strike of all branches of industry for eight hours as a day's work, and we call on the legislature for the immediate enactment of an eight hour law, and the enforcement of a severe penalty for its violation, and that the employment of all children under fourteen years of age be prohibited.

Resolved, that it is our purpose never to give up the strike till these propositions are enforced.

The Executive Committee.

Proclamation issued during the 1877 St. Louis general strike. The proclamation, which was probably written at Central *Turnhalle*, was also issued in German.

A DAY OF EXCITEMENT.
The Strikers Growing Bolder and Bolder in Their Movements.
The First Acts of Violence Committed Here Yesterday.
A Destructive Raid on Dozier, West & Co.'s Bakery.
Several Tenancies and Factories Forcefully Closed.
All the Employes Driven into the Streets.
Hundreds of Men, Women and Girls Compelled to Abandon Work.
Mass Meeting of the Strikers at Lucas Market.
They Issue a Manifesto Setting Forth Their Claims and Demands.
A Long Procession Which Degrades into a Mob.
The Present Position as Regards the Various Railroads.
Postal Matters and Items Concerning Mail Trains.
Arrangements for Transporting Mails on Steamboats.
Demand for Increased Wages by Boat Hands and Routabouts.
The Demand Backed Up by the Railroad Strikers.
Proclamation by the Mayor Advising the Closing of Business Houses.
And Ordering Promptly the Closing of Demon-Strations.
The Sheriff Issues a Call for a Peace Committee.
Proceedings of Citizens for Forming a Protective Service.
Condition of Affairs at East St. Louis and Quadra.

ing "Damn the Black Dutch" besieged them. Twenty-eight died in the violence that followed. A young Turner master-at-arms was among them, by some reckoning the first Union officer to lose his life in the Civil War.

Enslaved workers accelerated their motion toward freedom throughout the war. Fleeing to Union Army lines, they mounted what W.E.B. DuBois has termed the most momentous "general strike" in U.S. history. Their actions set the stage for Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and transformed the Civil War into a freedom struggle in which ex-slaves played a significant military role. The sudden transformation from slavery to freedom set an electric example that tremendously influenced white workers and soldiers as well. Dreaming of their own "emancipation," they seized on the utterly utopian goal of an eight-hour working day (the 10-hour day was still largely a pipe dream) as the centerpiece of their new demands. The Turners became firm eight-hour supporters and Central *Turnhalle* came to be the gathering place for St. Louis' emboldened but still fragile trade unions.

In July 1877, in the midst of a nationwide railroad strike, St. Louis workers again took decisive steps — some of which led to Central *Turnhalle*. As the railroad strike took hold in East St. Louis and raised their expectations, workers, led by the socialist Workingmen's Party, demanded eight hours and an end to child labor. With workplaces still small, on average employing less than 10 persons, "tramping" strike processions were instrumental in spreading the walkout. The general strike, arguably the first of its kind in the nation, was coordinated through meetings at Central *Turnhalle*. The police abandoned the streets; mayoral authority was inconsequential for a time. Central *Turnhalle* became, in effect, the city hall. As anti-strike militias massed and federal arms poured into the city, a worried *Turnhalle* caretaker (working there while the most active members of the society were on an excursion to Milwaukee) asked strike leaders to leave. But within days after the general strike ended

Headlines from the Missouri Republican, July 25, 1877

Businessmen were horrified by the control of the streets that workers demonstrated during the 1877 general strike, and by the power of tramping strikers. Their desire to indicate business' control over the streets was part of the motivation for the organization of the Annual Veiled Prophet Parade, begun in 1878. The first Veiled Prophet was John Priest, who had been police commissioner during the strike and had taken a prominent role in its suppression.

in defeat, Central *Turnhalle* again hosted the regular meetings of the city's unionists and radicals.

By 1888, when Central *Turnhalle* hosted the third national convention of the American Federation of Labor, the mass movement of workers had prepared the ground for a holiday-making resolution which was to shake the world for more than a century. In the early 1880s, the organization that became the AFL joined with other groups in planning for a huge May 1, 1886, wave of demonstrations and strikes designed to enforce the eight-hour day.

May 1 made sense as a target date because it exemplified change and motion. Leases typically expired on that day; building tradesmen often began new wage agreements for the peak building season on May 1. European immigrants, especially those from the countryside, traditionally used May Day as a "green" holiday to mark the coming of spring and new growth. As one labor writer put it, "With buds and blue hills beckoning," hundreds of thousands of U.S. workers struck for more free time on May 1, 1886. Three days later, a bombing and police riot at Chicago's Haymarket Square, during a rally commemorating strikers shot by police, signalled the beginning of a reign of terror which resulted in the hanging of four unjustly convicted anarchist labor leaders. (Among them was Adolph Fischer who had joined the printers' union in St. Louis in the 1870s before moving to Chicago). Thus Central *Turnhalle's* welcome to the small and beleaguered AFL in 1888 was especially courageous and significant. So too was the action of the convention in approving a proposal to renew eight-hour agitation by planning for a large May 1, 1890, campaign. When this resolution was conveyed to European labor leaders, they took it up so thoroughly that May 1 went from being a "green" holiday to an international labor holiday. Thus, the 20th Century's most famous day of workers' celebration was rooted in a motion passed at Central *Turnhalle* in St. Louis.

But May Day also has its roots in much broader working-class motion: Slaves moving to freedom, German radicals moving to the American republic, tramping strikers spreading their eight-hour campaigns, renters switching houses and migrants from rural areas moving around May poles in celebrations of spring. The buildings we will see on tour are the products of the coordinated motion of working people. The history they evoke is the result of simple and profound movement by the builders of America.

* * *

From the late 19th Century through the first two decades of the 20th Century, the strength of the labor movement in St. Louis was based in community-wide mobilizations that carried explicit or implicit connotations of a wider search for power in the community and nation. The labor movement relied on a community base of support and networks in ethnic and neighborhood solidarity. These networks, and the links between labor and radical groups such as the Socialist Party, brought a powerful base of support locally for the notion of including all laboring people in the struggle to improve their conditions — even as the AFL, which concentrated on organizing mostly skilled workers, triumphed on the national level. Indeed, in the years between the turn of the century and World War I, the St. Louis labor movement seemed poised to transcend the organizational limitations of the AFL, to be more reflective of the entire working-class community and to present a larger challenge than did the AFL to business in the St. Louis urban arena.

Broadway and Washington

'Washington Avenue Massacre' and the 1900 Streetcar Strike

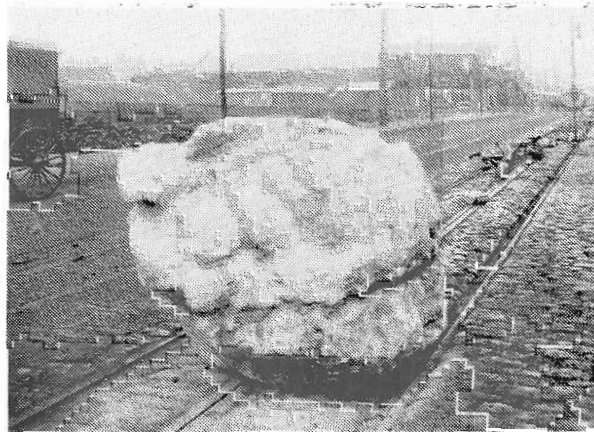
—by Dina Young

(Some material for this essay was taken from Dina Young's essay, "The Streetcar Strike of 1900," published in Gateway Heritage, Summer 1991, with permission from Gateway Heritage.)

On June 10, 1900, three striking streetcar workers were killed and 14 of their fellows were injured when a hastily-formed posse of upper-class St. Louisans opened fired on them as they paraded past the corner of Broadway and Washington. The "Washington Avenue Massacre," as the incident came to be known, was the bloodiest conflict in the long and politically-charged streetcar strike of 1900.

The strike erupted in early May, when members of the recently-organized Amalgamated Association of Street Railway Employees Local 131 voted to enforce their demand for recognition of their union. Working conditions for streetcar workers had always been abysmal but had worsened when the different streetcar companies were consolidated in 1899, creating a near monopoly for the St. Louis Transit Company. The monopoly imposed 14- to 17-hour shifts on its workers and threatened to reduce the wages of some employees. The successful organizing of the streetcar workers was due to the intense effort and support of radicals within the Central Trades and Labor Union (the predecessor of the present-day Greater St. Louis Labor Council), which was then socialist-influenced. Streetcar company officials, whose owners were among the St. Louis civic elite, believed that broader issues of control of the city were linked to unionization. Company officials fired all the union leaders, vowing to "die with their boots on" before recognizing the union. In response, the union called a strike.

From its outset the strike sounded a chord that resonated throughout St. Louis' working-class communities. Workers perceived the St. Louis Transit Company monopoly as representing the efforts of West End businessmen to dominate the city's economic and political life. Meanwhile, workers depending on the streetcars for their transportation found that monopoly control had resulted in poor service and dangerous conditions.



*Photo by Harry E. Stege,
courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society*

This five-ton boulder was rolled onto the streetcar lines by strikers and their supporters.

Working-class St. Louisans throughout the city responded to the strike declaration as if to an alarm. On the first day of the strike, a group of young women from the United Garment Workers Union formed a human barricade at 15th and Washington Avenue, directly in the path of an oncoming car, forcing it to halt. One of the women rushed toward the car, waving her union card, and confronted the conductor, who was her



Photo by George Stark, courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society

Members of the posse comitatus in a streetcar barn.

brother, and implored him: "Don't do what you are doing!" The non-union operators carried weapons and demonstrated their resolve to use them. On the first day of the strike, a 16-year-old boy was wounded when a non-union conductor fired into a massing crowd. During the course of the strike, several people died from the same sort of action. Within a few hours of the strike vote, men, women and children pelted scab-operated streetcars with bricks and stones, cut power lines and obstructed tracks. In joining the streetcar workers struggle to establish a union, strike supporters demonstrated the control they had in their own neighborhoods while playing out their frustrations over their limited role in the life of the city.

The St. Louis elite believed that open class warfare had erupted, and that the police were unreliable instruments to repress it. Political figures who controlled the police, while decidedly favoring the company behind the scenes, did not want to alienate the political support of the working class. Missouri Governor Lon V. Stephens refused to call up the state militia, but he did authorize St. Louis' sheriff to form a posse comitatus. John H. Cavender, a local realtor who had taken up arms to repress the St. Louis general strike of 1877, was appointed posse commander. He accepted only prominent citizens for the posse, most of whom were judges, bankers and attorneys. Posse organizers advertised for men who "would not shoot at a child . . . for sneering at them, but who [would] con-

tinue to shoot to the bitter end if necessity require[d]." By June 8, almost 1,300 possemen were on active duty. Their headquarters was on the southwest corner of Washington and Broadway, but they were stationed in Transit Company car barns and power houses in working-class neighborhoods around the city. Posse leaders gave instructions that St. Louisans resisting arrest were to be "shot on the spot." The presence of armed members of the upper class in working-class neighborhoods created an extremely volatile atmosphere.

On Sunday morning, June 10, about 800 strikers assembled at Eads Bridge and crossed the Mississippi River to attend a picnic at Edgemont Park given in their honor by the Belleville, Ill., local of the Railway Employees Union. Late that rainy afternoon the strikers returned home. Led by a drum and bugle, the procession crossed the bridge and continued west on Washington Avenue. The posse headquarters was abuzz with possemen who knew that the strikers were returning from the picnic, and they stood ready to attack. There was some jeering as the strikers peacefully paraded by the posse barracks.

As the paraders' ranks stretched between Broadway and Sixth Street, a streetcar from the Delmar Avenue Division made its way west on Washington, passing between the barracks and the strikers. The posse leaders later claimed they heard a brick or rock hit the streetcar, and gave an order to arrest the brick-thrower. As three possemen charged into the crowd of strikers, a pistol went off. Hearing the shot, possemen, who had lined Washington Avenue from Broadway to Sixth Street, instantly opened fire on the strikers. So did their fellow posse members, from windows inside the barracks. When the smoke cleared, conductors C. Edward Thomas and Edward Burkhardt, along with motorman George Rine, lay dying in the street. Fourteen other strikers were wounded. None of the posse was injured. The streetcar men had been unarmed.

Bystanders who witnessed the fracas recounted that posse members appeared to have "lost all control over themselves" during the incident. Journalist William Marion Reedy, who was not a strike sympathizer, commented that seeing the possemen rush for their guns, quickly load, then dash for the street, showed that they "were more than half glad 'the music had begun.'"

St. Louisans outraged by the Washington Avenue killings called for the dismissal of the posse. After several reductions in its size, the posse was finally disbanded after July 4. The Washington Avenue Massacre did not end the streetcar strike. It did, however, capture in a stark moment the volatility of turn-of-the-century class divisions in the city.

Although an arbitrated settlement was made in the strike, most leaders and many of the rank-and-file lost their jobs and were replaced by workers from the "countryside." The company claimed they would be more docile than the St. Louis workers who had tried to unionize the lines. Eighteen years later, however, these workers successfully organized Local 788 of the AASRE (now the Amalgamated Transit Union).

* * *

After the streetcar strike, with a few notable exceptions, the elite would not personally gather arms to intimidate the working class. From this point on, the elite began to organize more effectively to control the police and to use legal means such as injunctions to control workers during strikes. For the next 20 years, St. Louis workers were given a powerful reminder that the call for law and order was connected to anti-unionism when the police held their annual "riot gun" parade, in which they displayed weapons originally used by the posse in the streetcar strike.

800-2000 Washington Avenue

Washington Avenue Garment District

Riding down Washington Avenue today, it may be difficult to imagine it teaming with people heading to work in the clothing industry that was centered along it. There, women and men speaking many different languages and from different cultures tried to eke out a living on piecework in an industry premised on cheap labor. While St. Louis had the lowest levels of immigration after the turn of the century of any major industrial city, those immigrants who came to the city — especially Italians and Russian Jews — were drawn to “the Avenue.” In addition, the industry drew upon native-born women whose choices of jobs was severely limited. After 1920, workers were increasingly comprised of rural migrants.

While many St. Louisans have heard that the garment industry eventually left St. Louis for cheaper labor in rural areas, the South and foreign countries, it might come as a surprise to know that the St. Louis garment district originated as a low-wage alternative to New York and Chicago. From the early part of the century, St. Louis garment manufacturers thought the key to success for the local industry was undercutting the wages of the more unionized New York and Chicago garment centers. Such a strategy allowed some local clothing manufacturers to grow rapidly and reap enormous profits and led to St. Louis’ rise as

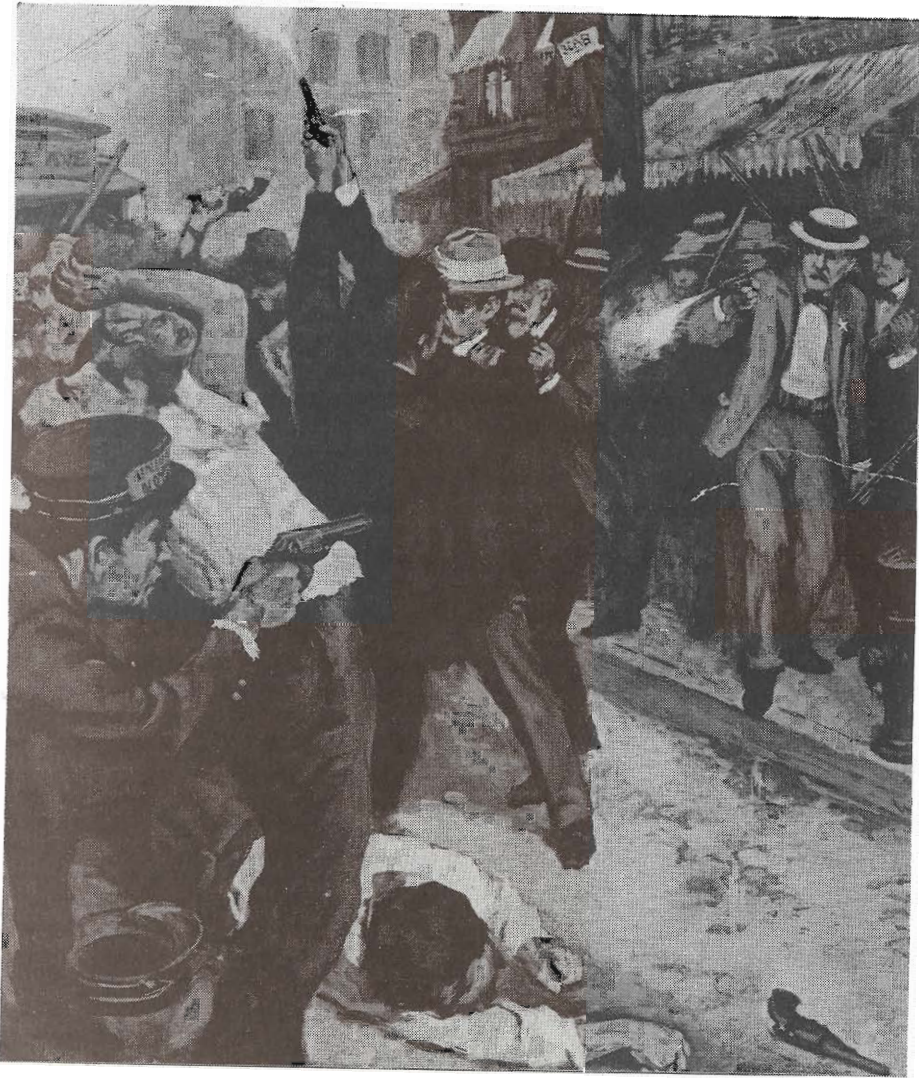


Photo: *Colliers Weekly*, June 30, 1900.

Artist's rendering of the Washington Avenue Massacre, June 10, 1900. Note that the artist for *Colliers* placed guns in the hands of streetcar workers. In fact, the paraders were unarmed. No posse member was wounded during the fracas. The Missouri Socialist proclaimed, “Most of the possemen were young sons of aristocrats and businessmen who had not the slightest sympathy with the working man and rather looked upon him as a wild beast that must be kept in order by the exercise of superior force.” William Reedy thought many of the posse members regarded killing strikers as “a sport.”



Photo courtesy of the Svekowsky Collection, School Sisters of Notre Dame

Young girls in a clothing shop, circa 1910. “Every worker at the machine is keyed up to quick production. She moves with a nervous tension from which she cannot relax. The deadening noise of wheels, the clamp of button stampers, the needles being driven through the cloth, the noise of the plaiting machines fill the air with vibrations, which made conversation impossible. These girls are piece workers and they speed themselves up to quickest action only to learn, as several testified, that the rate has been lowered, the wage does not rise.”

—St. Louis School of Social Economy Study, 1910

one of the largest clothing manufacturing centers in the country after World War I.

For workers, such policies meant long hours for little compensation during the busy season, with no work at all for long periods during the off-season. This was especially the case for women, who rarely earned wages sufficient to support themselves. Employers justified low pay through the traditional argument that women's wages were supplementary, but studies of St. Louis women garment workers in the 1910s found that most of them provided primary support for themselves or their family.

Several generations of workers struggled to create decent working conditions in the garment district, a struggle that brought them into conflict with the manufacturers. One of the first major battles was against Marx & Haas, the largest clothing manufacturer in the city by 1910, with more than 1,000 employees in two locations — at 13th and Washington and at 16th and Market. Conditions had improved at Marx & Haas with the complete organization of its employees into the United Garment Workers of America after 1902. The UGWA at the national level was a generally conservative union, concerned with the interests of skilled male tailors and cutters. But in St. Louis, the union had taken on a more militant character, in large part because of the women in the shops who joined the UGWA's ranks. In 1902, the women workers of Marx & Haas, who did all of the production except cutting, had organized into a separate local, No. 67, following the UGWA's practice of segregating locals according to gender. By bargaining together with the men and engaging in sympathetic strikes, the Marx & Haas locals had reduced hours from 60 to 54 per week, had implemented a \$5 per week minimum wage (still far below a living wage) and had forced the company to cease contracting out work, which had caused exploitative conditions.

In 1907, Local 67 President Hannah Hennessey travelled to a conference of the Women's Trade Union League in Chicago. That experience would help Hennessey and Local 67 together become a dynamo in the local labor movement. The WTUL was dedicated to advancing women's industrial status and building support networks for women that were lacking in the AFL. Hennessey had worked in the garment trade from age 13 and had lived a life of low pay and little leisure. When she went to Chicago, her main interest had been in finding out how to promote buying union-label goods. But she came back convinced of the power of women's networking and organized a chapter of the WTUL in St. Louis. Local 67 became the organizational base for the WTUL and began to develop other women labor leaders who were determined to move women to the forefront of the labor movement in St. Louis, eliminate the city's sweatshops and build women's economic and political power.

In 1913, Marx & Haas decided that the control workers were exerting inside the plant had gone too far. A confrontation began when a worker, a man with tuberculosis (a common malady for garment workers) tried to use the elevator to deliver some work to another floor. His supervisor ordered him to walk up the stairs instead of going up the elevator. He refused and was given a week's layoff. The men on the floor, all recent immigrants, walked out in protest, and the women of Local 67 followed, demanding his reinstatement. Marx & Haas locked them out and the workers struck in response.

Marx & Haas was a member of the Citizen's Industrial Alliance of St. Louis. The CIA had originated as a consortium of leading businessmen who, remembering the streetcar strike of 1900, had organized to ensure labor peace during the 1904 World's Fair. Fearing the power of unified labor, they made agreements with skilled trade unions during the fair. After the fair they inaugurated an open-shop drive. They used a city-wide blacklist; hired detective agencies to infiltrate unions; established an employment bureau and training school to re-

Kinloch, Central 438-R	MATHEW KIELY Former Chief of St. Louis Police	BELL Olive 96
Kiely Secret Service Agency PROTECTION DEPARTMENT Local and Foreign Work Solicited Suite 1, 2, 3 Nulsen Bldg. 6th and Olive Sts. ST. LOUIS, MO.		
A. L. CHAMBLIN, Principal. JOS. CHAMBLIN, Supt. A. L. CHAMBLIN, Jr., Sec-Treas.		
CHAMBLIN SECRET SERVICE CO. Organized 1900. Incorporated 1903 Shadowing, Labor Complications, Missionary work among employees. Competent operatives in all departments A SPECIALTY. Expert service in Accident and Life Insurance, Railroad Checking and Testing, Criminal, Legal Civil Investigations and all legitimate detective work. Resident Operatives in all Important Cities. Telephones: Bell, Lindell 1246 Kinloch, Delmar 3623-J 3849 KENNERLY AVE.		

Advertisements in a St. Louis employers' magazine. While the Pinkertons were the most notorious of the anti-labor detective agencies, smaller outfits proliferated. St. Louis became a leading city for these agencies; by 1910, it was the headquarters of the largest one in the midwest.

duce their dependence on unions for skilled workers; established a legal department to promote the use of the injunction against picketing; and fought labor's use of the boycott vigorously. The crowning victory of this campaign was the Buck's Stove and Range Case, a landmark Supreme Court ruling that essentially outlawed the boycott. Their most important public activity, however, was propagandizing St. Louisans against unions by defining unions as impediments to civic progress.

Marx & Haas engaged the services of the Matthew Kiely Detective Agency. Kiely had been installed as St. Louis' police chief shortly after the 1900 streetcar strike. Workers remembered his order to "shoot and shoot to kill" during a 1903 Teamster carriage drivers' strike. The uproar this caused had led to his resignation. He then formed his detective agency, which became notorious among workers as a "thug" agency for employers. Every day Kiely's agents brought strikebreakers to the doors of Marx & Haas from as far away as Chicago and New York. To the dismay of Marx & Haas, workers persuaded many not to cross. The network of women built by the local Women's Trade Union League was able to find jobs for some of the strikers so that they could survive. These local bonds of solidarity proved crucial in the initial months of the strike.

One month into the strike, Marx & Haas used the CIA's legal services to secure an injunction which ordered that all union members and their sympathizers "be perpetually restrained and enjoined from interfering with the plaintiff's business by picketing or patrolling the sidewalks or streets in front of or in the vicinity of the premises occupied by plaintiff located at the southwest corner of Thirteenth and Washington Avenue or southeast corner of Sixteenth and Market." Meanwhile, the police were ordered to instruct any woman they found on the streets looking for work to go to Marx & Haas.

This local struggle was transformed into a national battle for the rights of labor through the efforts of Fannie Sellins. A charter member of Local 67, Sellins became president after Hannah Hennessey became too ill with tuberculosis to continue in that position. (Hennessey died one month into the strike.) Of Irish

The 'Hello Girls' Take on Southwestern Bell

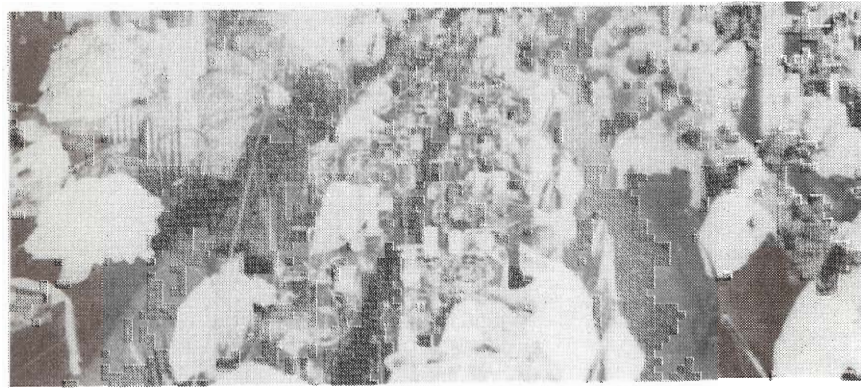
background, Sellins was determined to unite the disparate ethnic groups through the union. Sellins began a nationwide speaking campaign to "tell the world of the wrongs of the overworked, underpaid garment workers" that transformed the local struggle into a national campaign for the rights of labor. This campaign would take her and fellow garment worker Kate Hurley across the country, from Colorado to Detroit, to the small mine towns of West Virginia and southern Illinois and to national conventions of unions. Sellins became a dynamic speaker, and together she and Hurley raised thousands of dollars and promoted a national boycott of Marx and Haas' goods. Soon, locals were sending in contributions that sustained the workers for 25 months. Marx & Haas had to close its Market Street factory, so effective was the boycott. Finally, in October 1911, Marx & Haas signed a contract with the UGWA.



Photo courtesy of Anthony Slomkoski III
Fannie Sellins, circa 1919.

The Marx & Haas struggle transformed Sellins' life and caused her to dedicate her life to the labor movement. She joined the Socialist Party, convinced that workers were ill-served by their relationship to the two major parties. But Sellins came into conflict with the conservative national leadership. Sellins had to fight the national organization to release funds given for the Marx & Haas struggle. When in 1912 another large clothing company in St. Louis, Schwab Clothing at 2649 Locust St., resisted unionization, Sellins and Hurley again launched a boycott campaign and another national speaking tour that was enormously successful. But the national office fought these efforts, arguing that it could not support boycotts because the courts had made them illegal. Eventually, Sellins left the UGWA and was hired by the United Mine Workers of America as an organizer to help workers in struggles in West Virginia and Pennsylvania. Over the next several years she endured extreme hardship, including imprisonment. She lost her life in 1919 when armed guards hired by the Allegheny Coal Company murdered her. While Marx & Haas kept its union label, the label did not continue to mean improved conditions.

By the 1920s, Marx & Haas workers were little better off than the majority on non-union garment workers in the district. In the 1930s, a union drive launched by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union finally succeeded in bringing a large number of clothing workers into the union.



A St. Louis shirt-making factory in the 1920s.

By 1913, women telephone workers became part of the local effort to make the labor movement more inclusive, particularly of women. Between 1913 and 1919, women telephone operators, inspired by the local Women's Trade Union League and the development of a national campaign to organize the phone companies, sought to join the ranks of labor unions on equal terms with men. In the end their movement failed, but they forced significant concessions out of Bell Telephone and challenged men in labor to modify their perceptions of women workers.

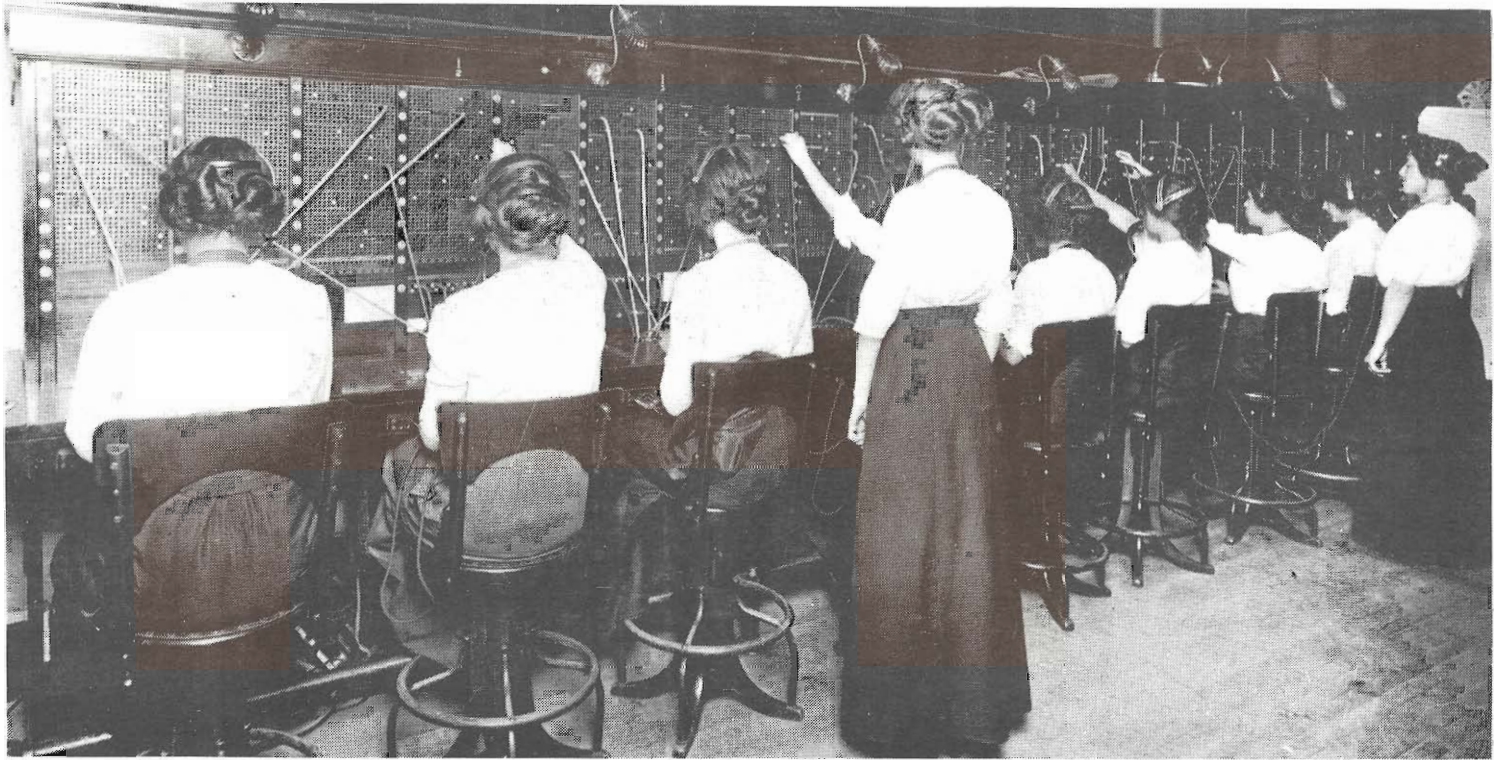
Women telephone workers complained of low wages, tyrannical rules and intense supervision. The telephone companies had strict rules for hiring only single women between the ages of 17 and 26 (and expected women to leave upon marriage). They hoped this young, temporary work force would not rebel against company discipline.

But in organizing and in striking, the "hello girls" spoke to a new kind of freedom to control their lives that made them a part of a general uprising of women in the second decade of the century. They responded with enthusiasm to the WTUL's drive to organize them in early 1913. Then, when the national WTUL held its convention in St. Louis in May 1913, they heard from their sisters in Boston about their successful organizing drive and found themselves part of a national campaign. The women were organized as a sub-local of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1, which had been organized in St. Louis in 1890. In comparison with the national union, IBEW Local 1 (composed of skilled male electrician) was relatively open to the admission of women and had even briefly supported a woman organizer in the 1890s. But the telephone operators' main support came from the local Women's Trade Union League. When male workers of the maintenance department at Southwestern Bell, members of Local 1, went on strike, the telephone operators decided to join them and demand recognition for themselves as well.

The sight of fashionably-dressed picketers greeting St. Louis residents downtown excited the attention of the press, which marvelled that unionism seemed to be reaching beyond the industrial workforce. For any who might have doubted the women's resolve, or who thought that many of the women from "respectable" jobs might be too demure to strike, the women proved themselves on the picket lines in a strike that lasted more than seven weeks. When a supervisor tried to persuade them to get off the streets and return to work, they chanted, "We're strikers . . . we're not working with scabs!" With horns blowing, bells ringing and extensive cheering, they brought a new energy to the labor movement. Plans were made to call out all 2,500 operators in every part of Missouri in sympathy in an attempt to extend the union statewide.

Soon, Southwestern Bell admitted that the strike had "materially crippled" its system and made a determined effort to break the women's resolve. AT&T sent a vice-president to St. Louis to help break the strike. The company hauled in strikebreakers from out of town. The women became part of mass arrests then taking place around garment, waiters and butchers strikes. Altogether, about 2,400 arrests were made in these strikes. The telephone women charged the police with brutality and with aiding the company's attempt to break the strike and joined these other workers in protesting at City Hall.

In response, the local labor movement pledged to teach Southwestern Bell a lesson. At a Central Trades and Labor Union meeting on August 5, at Aschen-



Two supervisors stand behind a row of Southwestern Bell telephone operators. By 1910, telephone operators were among the most closely-supervised workers in the country. In addition to these walking supervisors, an "observation supervisor" carefully listened to conversations between subscribers and the

Photo by W.C. Persons, Courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society
operators, ensuring that the exchange met the company's rigid protocol. Operators handled more than 400 calls an hour. They were not allowed to stand, sit sideways, smile or talk to each other while at the switchboard.

roedel Hall, 3535 Pine St., the delegates unanimously declared a boycott. Carpenters' Delegate Duncan announced to the assembled: "Our local union declared in no uncertain terms that no man could claim to be a true Union man who will not forthwith throw the Bell telephone out."

But before the local labor movement could test its ability to launch a boycott against an item many working-class people did not own, the IBEW's executive board made a settlement that called only for the strikers' reinstatement. The women felt betrayed when they discovered that the executive board, composed of 10 men, could settle the strike without their vote. When a representative of the union presented the settlement to the women, he was "hooted" down. Many of the women never returned to work at the company.

Yet the strike made an impact. The company instituted an eight-hour day and raised wages in order to stifle further attempts to organize. And the lessons regarding union democracy for women helped to spur the organization of the Telephone Operator's Department as an independent body within the IBEW, which was, wrote one historian, "the first national trade union controlled and officered by women."

In 1919, St. Louis' Local 116 of the Telephone Operators made another attempt to organize within the context of a movement for a national agreement. Operators were hopeful because during World War I the telephone lines had come under government control. They expected government influence to help them gain a voice in the workplace. They demanded recognition of their union and went on strike on June 20. By July 12, Kinloch Telephone Company, a small rival telephone operation in St. Louis, recognized the union and negotiated a contract.

But Bell Telephone fought back with even more vigor than it had in 1913. Strikebreakers from Little Rock, Chicago and towns in Missouri and Texas were housed at the Jefferson Hotel (now Jefferson Arms) at Bell's expense. They hired union spies and stool pigeons. More sensational was the company's use of St. Louis County police and union infiltrators in order to set up O.E. Jennings and other officials of IBEW on charges of abducting a woman operator. Meanwhile, the government refused to respond effectively to demands for unionization and returned the telephone system to private control.

St. Louis' male workers were unusually supportive of the women in the 1919 strike. IBEW Local 1 linemen and wiremen walked out in sympathy with the women; Local 1 members refused to work on constructing buildings being wired by Southwestern Bell. St. Louis labor unions organized a boycott that was vigorously endorsed by the St. Louis Building Trades Council. But the women were angered when the national union rescinded an order for a nationwide strike, which they felt was necessary to effectively take on Bell Telephone. The strike lasted six weeks but ended in a compromise settlement after the women realized the government would not force Bell's hand. The strikers had won increased pay and other benefits for Bell's telephone workers — but not recognition of their union.

The 1919 strike prompted the phone company not only to improve working conditions, but also to organize a company union to improve its public image and to stifle any attempts to organize an AFL union. Company unions enjoyed great acclaim in the popular press in the 1920s as a cooperative style of labor-management relations that would bring peace to the workplace. But company unions gave no real democratic voice to workers or offered any practical solutions to their grievances. The company organized, financed and controlled the company union; officials with the power to fire workers were in most cases its head officers. Meanwhile, the IBEW abandoned any effort to organize the telephone operators. Some workers charged that a "gentlemen's agreement" had been made that exchanged recognition for some men for a halt to any at-

tempt to organize the women.

The memory of the activism of these women, who had been the agents of change at Bell Telephone, was soon forgotten. Thirty years later, a new generation of women and men finally organized the company under the Communications Workers of America.

* * *

The 1913 and 1919 telephone strikes were part of the rise and decline of the prospects for an inclusive labor movement in the local AFL. During World War I's tight labor market, St. Louis workers rallied to labor's banner, embracing the promise of inclusiveness and ultimately bringing the city to the verge of another general strike. The catalyst was another streetcar workers' strike in February 1918, which ended in recognition for the workers. St. Louis workers regarded this as an indication of business' vulnerability in a tight labor market. Immediately following the streetcar settlement, workers responded enthusiastically to a new drive for "100 percent unionism" launched by the Central Trades. A strike wave began at the end of February. Five thousand department store clerks walked out. They were soon joined by 3,500 employees of Wagner Electric, 3,000 garment workers, 4,000 tobacco workers — escalating daily until at one point more than 30,000 workers were on strike. Unskilled workers and others (such as department-store clerks), who previously were thought to be unsympathetic to unions, participated in what was widely interpreted as a community uprising as well as a workplace-based organizing drive. The *St. Louis Labor* newspaper declared: "St. Louis is in the midst of an industrial war — the biggest and most serious since the memorable days of 1877."

In the end, employer intransigence blocked the expansion of unionism in St. Louis. Employers banded together, defying the government's National War Labor Board, a mediating body. "We have from the beginning an utter disregard of the government, of the National War Labor Board by a large number of concerns in St. Louis, practically all of whom are low wage concerns," reported one NWLB official, who declared that there was evidence of "a conspiracy" among employers. This local battle presaged the successful national campaign employers would mount for the open shop in the postwar period.

While St. Louis labor — under the influence of socialists, industrial union advocates and the WTUL — attempted to move beyond craft unionism from 1900 to 1918, these efforts faded rapidly in the open-shop era of the 1920s. The postwar red scare caused a severe backlash against radicals in the local AFL. This coincided with the repudiation by AFL international unions of any local efforts toward independent action and local solidarity. The impact of these developments was evident to one observer of the Central Trade meetings, who noted that a "tired feeling" had descended on the local body and lamented the contrast with earlier times, when labor had been the main opposition to business in St. Louis: "The regular monthly meetings of the Central Trades & Labor Union are gatherings of the Old Guard. It is indeed surprising to observe the absolute absence of the younger generation. Out of about 200 delegates you hardly find three men or women below thirty years of age. . . . Lively debates and prolonged deep discussions are as rare as banana trees in Arctic regions."

The 1920s saw the contraction of the local labor movement and the fading of any hopes that the labor movement would be a force for social transformation, locally or nationally. Meanwhile, a new working class, drawn from St. Louis' rural and southern periphery, emerged in the 1920s without any contact with organized labor or with the radical groups that had been such a vital part of St. Louis labor before the War.

Yet in the midst of anti-unionism of the 1920s, a group of black workers defied the odds and launched a struggle for recognition from the Pullman Company and from the AFL.

18th and Market

Union Station and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters

Union Station was the site where workers from around the country and the world arrived in St. Louis in search of opportunity. It was also the point at which railroad passenger cars from the South became desegregated, the border demarcating the Jim Crow South from the less rigorously segregated North. During World War I and the 1920s, an increasing number of African-Americans disembarked at Union Station in the hopes of escaping rural poverty and white racism. Although they arrived with high hopes, most were disappointed. Few jobs were open to them except as servants, janitors and laborers. While some industrial employers, such as Scullin Steel, hired one-third native white workers, one-third immigrant workers, and one-third black laborers in the hope that racial and ethnic tensions would keep workers from unionizing, most employers refused to hire blacks for any job except that of janitor or porter. Such divisions were often reinforced in St. Louis by formal or informal craft union rules which excluded black workers from membership. Because of this experience, many black workers considered white workers and their unions as opponents of their own progress.

Pullman was the largest private employer of black labor in the country by 1915. George Pullman had built his sleeping car company on the basis of personalized service and viewed African-Americans as well-suited to the servile, always-smiling role. Pullman porters, with relatively steady jobs in a prestigious corporation, were privileged when compared to other black workers, and they viewed a job at Pullman as a way out of poverty. But their "privileged" status simply reflected the poor conditions for black workers in general. Often the only job a black college graduate could land, Pullman porters were paid \$67 per month for 400 hours of work and put in many hours of unpaid labor. They received no pay for making up berths and preparing the car before the train started.

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was organized in 1925. Its charismatic leader, A. Philip Randolph, was a socialist who saw the need to connect economic and civil rights issues. He saw racism as the basis for the exploitation of all workers. The Brotherhood recognized the need to overcome anti-union opposition prevalent in the African-American community because of AFL racism as well as the entrenched anti-unionism of Pullman. The BSCP faced a battle even to get a charter from the AFL. Black workers were specifically banned from the four main railroad unions. The workers who tried to organize the union in the 1920s saw



These immigrants, arriving at Union Station in 1920, would probably have encountered black Pullman porters. Both groups shared dreams of a better life, but the St. Louis job market held different prospects for each.

the BSCP as the “spearhead” that “would open the doors of the entire labor movement to African-Americans.”

Among those leaders was E.J. Bradley, a St. Louis Pullman porter, considered by the company as one of its most loyal workers. He had served the company for 17 years when he resigned his job on Nov. 1, 1926, to organize the union. On the same day, he opened an office near Union Station, at 11 N. Jefferson Ave., in Room 208 of the People’s Finance Building.



Photo courtesy Library of Congress

An “offstage” Pullman porter takes a respite from his service role.

St. Louis was the company’s third-largest district. Pullman took the threat of a St. Louis organizing effort seriously and threatened to fire workers caught talking to Bradley or even walking on the same side of the street. With a plethora of union spies in its employ, Pullman was able to make good on its threat. One local porter was fired after his wife attended a BSCP meeting. In addition to this repression of union organization, the Pullman Company took steps to make its company union more appealing as a voice for black workers.

Pullman used financial clout and the racism of the AFL to battle the Brotherhood. After the union started its campaign, the Pullman Company routed huge amounts of advertising dollars to the *St. Louis Argus*, an African-American newspaper. In return, the *Argus* began a virtual crusade against the Brotherhood, playing on the widespread distrust among blacks toward trade unionism. The same distrust and financial clout brought condemnation of the campaign from St. Louis’ most influential black ministers. Only two of the major African-American churches, Central Baptist and Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion, supported the cause.

While Bradley claimed that 50 percent of black workers had joined the Brotherhood in 1926, the company campaign soon proved overwhelming. Bradley persevered as membership dropped off: “When I started this work I knew it was for a just cause, and as long as we prove that we are truthful in our statements and deal squarely and fairly with our fellow men we are bound to succeed.” In 1933, when the national office suggested he close the St. Louis office because of the lack of interest in the Brotherhood, Bradley refused, arguing that “if it was ever closed, the Pullman Company would feel that it had won a signal victory in St. Louis and such propaganda would have weakened many other smaller districts.” His tenacity paid off. In 1934, under new political leadership in Washington, D.C., and a renewed spirit toward organizing, the campaign was renewed. In 1937, the Brotherhood signed its first contract.

The organization of the Pullman porters created a base of leaders among working-class African-Americans who understood the relationship between economic issues and civil rights. This organizational base laid the foundation for African-American workers’ protests for job rights during World War II, as is discussed in another section of this booklet.



Photo: Schomburg Center, New York Public Library

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, founded in 1925, became the largest representative of black workers in America. “Fight or be slaves” was adopted as the motto of the union.

City Hall and the Unemployed Protests of the 1930s

Long before the stock market crash of 1929, St. Louisans recognized the severity of the economic downturn that would become the Great Depression. There already were 75,000 unemployed in St. Louis by April 1929. The extent to which the local AFL might be capable of leading a movement in behalf of the unemployed was tested in 1929. A few women delegates to the Central Trades called for a rally in support of the unemployed. The rally failed to come off, and the organization retreated into inaction. This left the door open for the rebirth of a community-based unionism through the experiences of the unemployed movement. Activists reignited and nurtured a perspective that focused on community organizing as a key component of workplace organization. The source of labor's revival in the 1930s was, at least in part, in a style of organization learned in the unemployed movement.

St. Louis was a pitiful place to be unemployed or destitute during the Great Depression. By 1932, unemployment reached 30 percent. To observe the local effects of the collapse of the economy, one had merely to travel to the riverfront, where a mile-long colony of the destitute, dubbed "Hooverville" after the discredited president, lived in ramshackle, makeshift housing. The little assistance (or relief, as it was called then) available was distributed through private agencies that were unprepared to deal with the incredible rise in need. A 1931 study showed that St. Louis' relief system was among the most miserly in the country. Much of the relief money was raised through workplace collections. Businesses, especially utilities, pressured employed workers to contribute to the drives. Going to the relief office was demoralizing. Relief officers constantly turned down requests for food or refused to honor more than one request from the individual.

St. Louis never experienced mass uprisings of the unemployed, as did such cities as Detroit and Cleveland. Nevertheless, unemployment activism remained an important factor — not only in terms of its challenge to St. Louis elites but also in terms of helping to introduce working-class people to forms of protest that had lain dormant in the 1920s.

The first group to try to organize the St. Louis unemployed was the Unemployed Council (UC), organized by the Communist Party both nationally and in St. Louis. The UCs attracted a diverse group. Women were among the most militant of the activists. African-Americans also joined the UC and took leadership roles, making the Unemployed Council protests the first major integrated protest movement in St. Louis. The group organized mass rallies of the unemployed and brought the hungry to City Hall, demanding that the wealthy pay more into the system.

Fannie Goldberg, who led at least one City Hall demonstration, remembered that the UC activists concentrated on mobilizing neighborhoods to obtain relief or to prevent evictions. "We would take members of the council and, instead of a person going to the relief station alone, we went with them. And on evictions, if we heard someone was being evicted, we would gather a group and get there and put the furniture back in." This neighborhood-based activity began to develop an allegiance to the organization among the unemployed. Hungry people who had been turned down by the relief agency when applying alone learned the power of collective action.

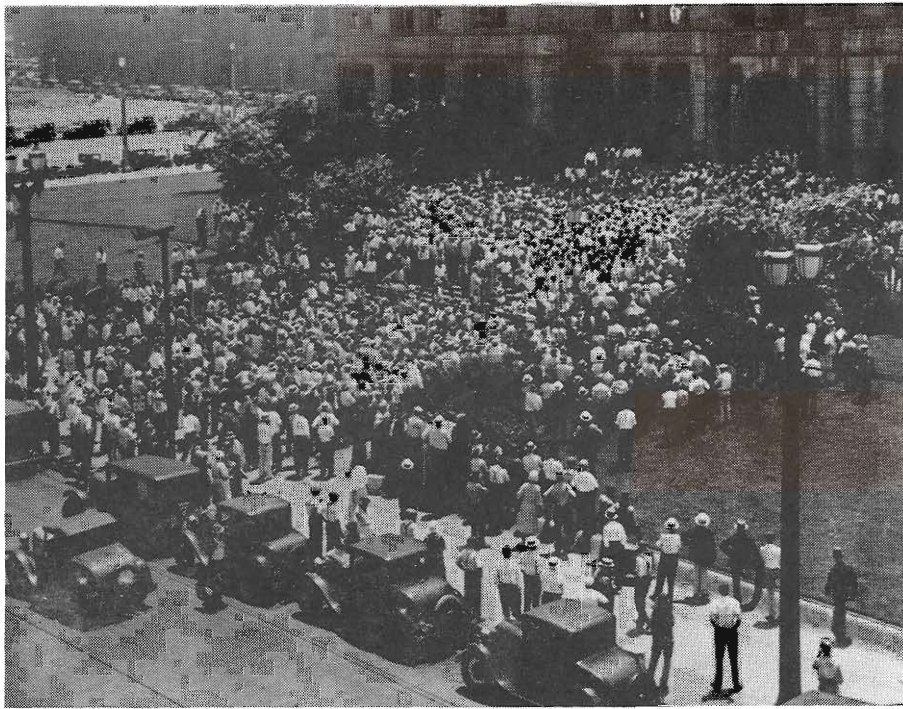


Photo courtesy St. Louis Post-Dispatch

The unemployed come to City Hall, 1931.



Photo courtesy National Archives

Police begin to clear out the unemployed demonstrators. Eventually they used clubs and tear gas to disperse the crowd.

The UCs initiated forms of protest associated mainly with the labor activism of the late 1930s. In January 1931, for instance, the UCs held what might be considered the first sit-down of the 1930s in St. Louis. It began with a huge march, one contingent coming from the south side and one from the north — the symbolic unification of an historic division of citizenry. By the time they arrived at City Hall, their ranks had grown to thousands. They demanded \$10 million in aid to the unemployed through taxation on the wealthy and corporations. A select delegation to the Board of Aldermen entered City Hall and refused to leave until those demands were met. The outcome was predictable: Police clubs and tear gas prevailed in a bloody melee.

Despite the imprisonment of many activists, the St. Louis UC's continued community organizing. They hit their stride just as the St. Louis relief system reached a crisis point. In June, the agencies started rejecting new relief applicants and announced the imminent cutoff of 15,000 families from the rolls. In an unusually candid reflection, one relief system employee said, "All through the Depression we have had the poor sharing with the poor. We have almost come to the limit of that." On July 8, after two weeks of neighborhood public hearings and house-to-house canvassing, the Unemployment Councils led a mass demonstration to City Hall, forcing the mayor to grant immediate relief to 1,000 unemployed workers to whom assistance had been denied. Three days later, another mass demonstration turned into a violent confrontation when police fired tear gas and bullets into the crowd, killing at least four people and wounding others. The "panic stricken" mayor called an extraordinary meeting, which appropriated \$2 million of city funds and passed recommendations to issue bonds for a \$4.6 million loan from the federal government. The city reinstated all those

Photo courtesy of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch

The unemployed stage a sit-down in the aldermanic chambers and gallery, April 1936. The arrow points to a city administrator who tried unsuccessfully to persuade them to leave.

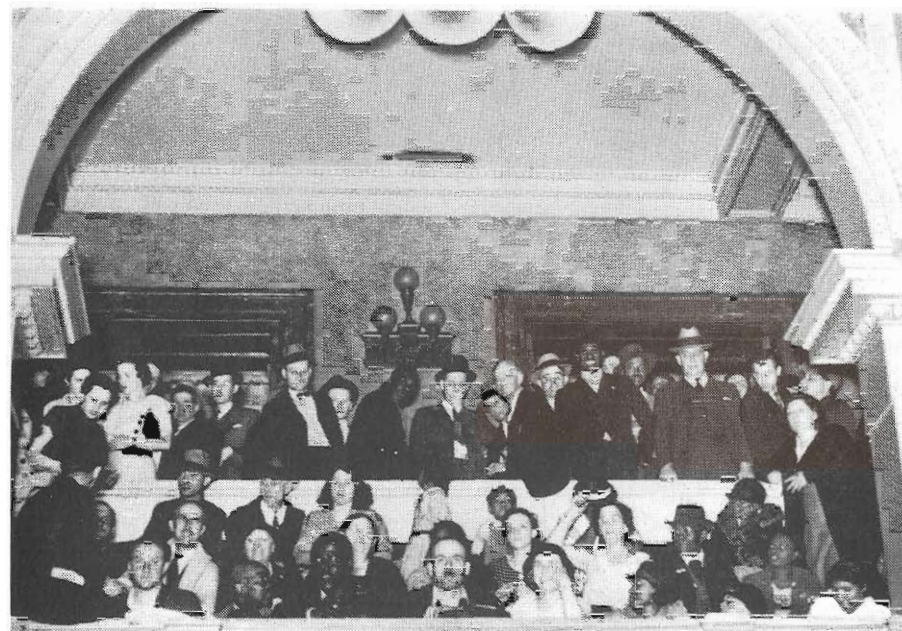


Photo courtesy of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Unemployed protestors in gallery of Board of Aldermen, April 1936.

who had been removed from the relief rolls.

This relief work led to the organization of women nutpickers, the most marginal workers in St. Louis' economy. Women nutpickers, mainly African-Americans, earned wages so low by shelling nuts in sweatshops that they were eligible for relief. Unemployment Council activists, gaining contact with the women through relief work, helped them organize. In May 1935, the nutpickers launched a strike. This strike was full of energy and community support, characterized by mass picketing (including help from the UC activists), singing and chanting on the picket lines and food collections. They won the strike and, over the next two years, they would struggle to keep their union alive against bitter odds. They eventually lost ground, but their approach to organizing and striking proved an example for other workers.

The UCs were in decline by early 1935, due in part to their association with the Communist Party and the continuing repression that accompanied it. But their style of community mobilization was copied by some of the new labor unions and the new American Workers Union. The AWU gained the cooperation of churches, black community groups and social workers as well as the allegiance of many of the unemployed. In April 1936, when 14,000 people were again dropped from the relief rolls, 50 members of the AWU staged a sit-down in the Board of Aldermen's chamber in City Hall. Testifying to the hunger they had known and singing "Solidarity Forever" and "We Shall Not Be Moved" and versions of Negro spirituals, the integrated group of men and women held firm until they won their demands that no person in St. Louis would go hungry.

By 1936, unemployed activism and attempts at self-organization among workers had created an alternative community network outside the AFL that was an effective support coalition for workplace and community struggles. This was a crucial ingredient in the success of the CIO, as we shall see in the next section. Many workers now understood the key to successful strikes and unionization was the ability to effectively build community mobilizations.



Sit-down strikers in possession of the Emerson Electric plant, March 1937.

Photo courtesy St. Louis Post-Dispatch

2018 Washington

Emerson Electric Sit-Down Strike: 'Human Rights Over Property Rights'

On March 8, 1937, about 200 workers began an occupation of the Emerson Electric plant at 2018 Washington Ave. They would remain there for 53 days in an attempt to win recognition for Local 1102 of the United Electrical Workers (UE). Theirs became the second-longest sit-down strike on record in American history. This struggle was part of the nationwide, mass uprising of workers in the 1930s.

The UE was affiliated with the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO), which split from the AFL over the issue of organizing on an industrial rather than craft basis. The CIO is best known in labor history for organizing the multi-plant industry giants such as U.S. Steel, General Electric and General Motors. In truth, though, the CIO depended on the community-based social movement that had developed in the early 1930s from the unemployed organizing and the self-organization of workers. The national CIO was little more than an office in the United Mine Workers of America headquarters in Washington, D.C., in 1936-37.

Emerson Electric workers, who produced Emerson's fans and small motors, were among the lowest-paid electrical industry workers in the country. During the Depression, their wages fell further, even as they found themselves forced to increase production. To some workers, including Frank Abfall, who started at \$10 a week for a 48-hour week in the 1920s, work at Emerson was not much better than the nearby garment sweatshops. "Most people just wanted to get out of Emerson," he claimed. Workers also complained of frequent layoffs, speed-ups, the unfair allocation of jobs and favoritism among foremen. Other factories, such as Century Electric, had a similar system. One Century worker wrote in 1934 to the Roosevelt administration: "They like to get men or women on \$12 or \$14 a week, work them like slaves, for 4 or 5 months out of the year. Peak Production they call it. And after that they lay them off for the Local or Federal Relief Agencies to feed for the remainder of the year."

In response to the Great Depression, Emerson instituted a modernization program to speed up production and put it on an assembly-line basis. (This also resulted in hiring the first women to work on the motor assembly line.) Workers faced a large number of accidents and overwork. Many would come to work before the bell rang in order to make their quota.

Emerson workers began organizing in 1933. In response, Emerson reinvigorated its moribund company union, which most workers considered "a joke." But in 1934, Century Electric workers launched an unsuccessful strike under the AFL's International Association of Machinists, and Emerson's workers lost faith in the AFL. They renewed their attempts to get results from the company union, passing motions for wage increases and the end of work speed-ups. But the company union was ineffective. Management, on the other hand, tried to teach workers that their policy was to "pay the going rate in the community." Workers knew that if they were to change conditions, they could not do so through an isolated movement.

In mid-1936, a group of Emerson workers started to organize a CIO local in the plant. The four main organizers, all of whom were assembly line workers, were radicals — members of either the Communist Party or the Socialist Party. All of them had experience in the unemployment movement. The drive

took hold quickly, and soon Local 1102 of the UE was chartered. By late 1936, this CIO group had the allegiance of most of the company union representatives. In December, UE-CIO representatives won election to the company union. The CIO drive received an enormous boost when workers at a General Motors' plant in Flint, Mich., launched a sit-down that quickly grew into a nationwide strike by GM workers — including those in St. Louis. In response, Emerson workers prepared for action.

Emerson managers were prepared for a showdown when they gave their final refusal to negotiate, but it is clear that they were unprepared for the full-scale occupation of the plant on March 8. At a prearranged time, workers escorted managers out of the plant, locked the doors and refused to let management back in. Mostly young and charged with enthusiasm, the sit-downers were led by a core group of the oldest employees. UE's lead organizer, William Sentner, a Communist Party member, stressed that "there is to be no violence," and the strike committee succeeded in getting police to allow workers to control the plant area, thus "giving us control of the strike in and about the plant." This obviously marked a significant departure from standard police behavior, caused in part by growing public support of unionism. More importantly, company "goons" at the St. Louis GM plant only a month before had gouged out an eye of the son of a police sergeant.

Workers mobilized community support on their behalf. Sentner had been the key organizer of the nutpickers strike in 1933 and brought the same tone and style of that strike to the Emerson struggle. Sentner posed the strike as a way to help the entire community: "You are not striking for yourselves alone. This is a civic strike because if everybody in this town received the pay scale you get, St. Louis would be a shanty town." Miners in southern Illinois, small business owners, tavern keepers and storekeepers came to their aid. When relief offices refused to give them aid, strikers and their supporters staged a sit-down in agency offices and won relief for some strikers.

Emerson managers remained confident they could defeat the union drive. They had insurance from the National Metal Trades Association, an electrical employers group that insured companies for losses during strikes. They assumed if the drive could be limited to Emerson, workers soon would tire of the occupation. As workers' resolve intensified, management called for assistance from local AFL officials, who willingly advised the company throughout the strike on how to handle the situation: Wait the workers out. Further, Emerson's attorneys counseled them that the 1935 Wagner Act, which guaranteed the right to collective bargaining, would soon be declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

But Emerson workers mounted a campaign to expand their strike to other plants. Henry Fiering, a CIO organizer and CP member, had hired into Century Electric and organized a core group of workers there. In April, this core successfully pulled Century workers out on strike with Emerson. The next day, the Supreme Court, reacting to the wave of strikes across the country, declared the Wagner Act constitutional. Emerson's management dejectedly agreed to begin negotiations — but not before asking for an injunction to have the strikers evicted. Sentner and the committee accused management of negotiating with "tear gas" but also realized the judge probably would evict the occupying workers. Agreeing to evacuate if the company agreed not to bring in strikebreakers, workers left the plant on April 29. Negotiations dragged on for another three weeks, with management refusing to budge on many issues. The union won only slightly-improved conditions. But with a recognized union, Emerson workers believed that they would continue to gain strength in their struggle against management. As Sentner argued during the sit-down: "It is . . . a question of human rights over property rights. It has not been settled yet."

The Emerson sit-down spurred organizing among many groups of work-



Photo courtesy of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Local 1102 members emerge from the Emerson plant, ending their sit-down strike. "We had our lives invested there," comments Lloyd Austin, head picket captain. When asked what workers were fighting for, he replies: "Freedom."

ers in the St. Louis area, including warehouse workers, furniture workers and even construction workers in St. Louis County. But workers now were divided between the CIO and the AFL.

After their victory in 1937, Emerson workers joined other St. Louis electrical workers in battling the determination of the industry to get rid of the union. In 1939, acting on an offer from the Evansville, Ind., Chamber of Commerce to lure the company away, Emerson announced it might move from St. Louis. But workers in Local 1102 mounted a community campaign that succeeded in persuading the company to stay in St. Louis.

Under the presidency of Stuart Symington (later a U.S. senator from Missouri), Emerson became a major war-industry contractor during World War II. Symington's connections to the bankers who controlled the allocation of war contracts raised Emerson from a small fan manufacturer to a leading business in the area. After the war, however, the company again threatened to move out of the area — this time to the south. But the Korean War and the Cold War economy, with the government divvying up military contracts, kept the company as a thriving local concern. By 1953, Emerson began to move its non-defense industries to the south where poor cities built the company factories free-of-charge and ensured a non-union labor force.

'There's No Future Unless We Make the Future'

When the GM plant was built in 1920, the area around it was virtually countryside. Workers even hunted on its grounds. Workers built a neighborhood and community up around the plant, and that community depended on the auto plant. For almost three generations, workers — mostly men — were able to create a life for themselves and their families on the wages and security they won from the largest corporation in the world.

In the 1920s the auto industry was booming, but there was an agricultural and mining depression. Workers in the auto plants largely were drawn from outside of St. Louis, many from hard-hit farming and mining communities. Many of these workers, proud of their status as auto workers, identified with their new employers. One worker recalled that some employees at the Fisher Body Division wore their work badges to church services every Sunday. Both companies sought to cultivate such loyalty, with lectures to workers, sponsored by the YMCA, on such topics as "False views of equality as incitements to social revolution," and "Fear has kept untold millions from making fortunes." The Chevrolet Division avoided hiring St. Louis workers, whom they considered prone to unionism.

But in an era when business and popular magazines proclaimed that the worker was "at peace with himself, his job and his Ford sedan," many of these auto workers could not afford the cars they made. Further, many questioned the values evident at the plant. Workers faced extreme pressure to increase production and then found themselves out of work for long periods of time. After a shift, exhausted Chevrolet workers were often seen to collapse on the grounds outside the plant, lying there until they could regain the strength to return home. Wives complained that their husbands would fall asleep at the evening meal. Subject to the sometimes tyrannical rule of foremen, who had the power to hire and fire, many workers had to perform special favors to ensure that they were called back from the regular layoffs. GM proclaimed that they cared about the workers and their families, but after St. Louis' tornado of 1927, workers were not allowed to go home during their shift to check if their families had survived it. Incidents such as these furnished searing memories that workers carried for years.

According to John Livingston, who would become a leader of the union movement at Chevrolet, workers who came to work at the plant soon learned that their interests differed from those of their bosses; management soon learned that the "country" workers were "not always what the company bargained for." Livingston, who had grown up on a farm in Missouri, claimed, "GM really organized the people . . . the conditions they gave, see? It was drive, drive, drive, that's all they knew. You didn't look around and see any old people." Livingston realized he opposed the company's values when he heard the production manager tell a foreman, "Krueger, I'm telling you, anytime you can't get out of a man all he's got in him in 10 years, you won't be a foreman around here." When workers tried to argue that there should be some sort of seniority on the job, they were told, "If you think we're going to have this thing they call seniority around here, you'd better get it out of your head. GM never had and they never will completely recognize seniority." Workers realized, as one put it, that it was "getting to the point there's no future unless we make the future."

In July 1935, Livingston and a co-worker read a newspaper article that

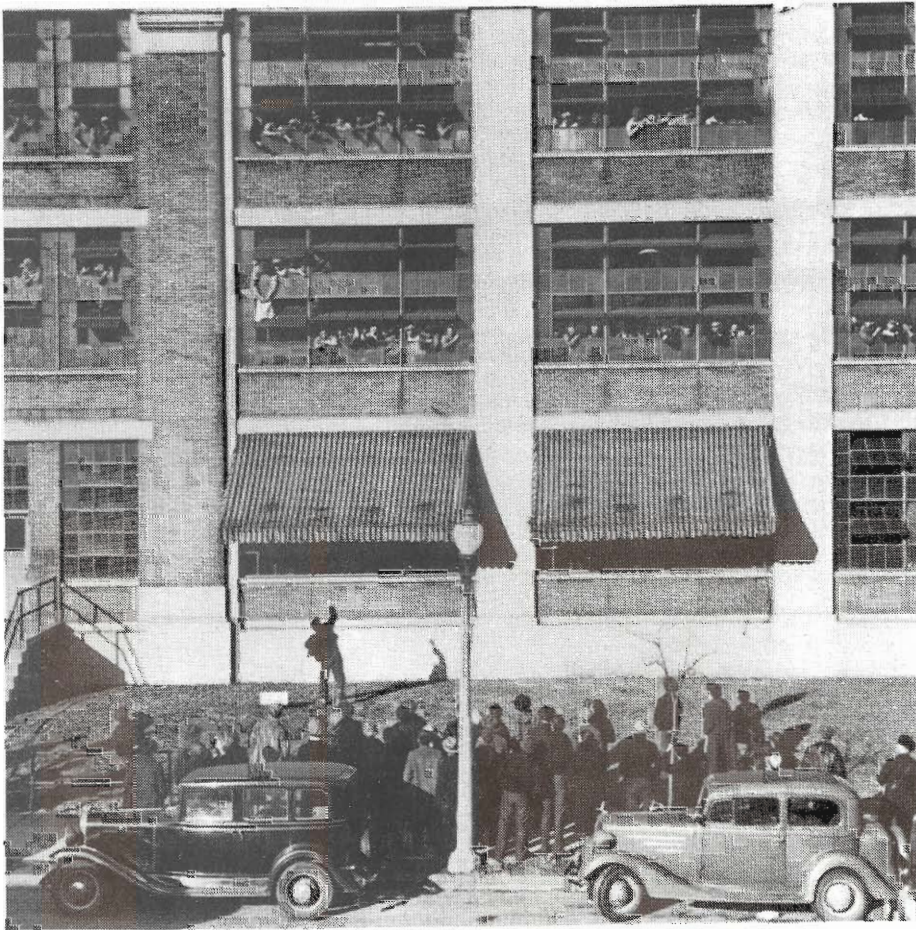


Photo courtesy of St. Louis Post-Dispatch

General Motors workers engage in a sit-down strike in Feb., 1937 in order to force management to fire their hired "thugs" who had beaten union supporters in the plant.

said workers had the legal right to organize and bargain collectively under the newly-enacted National Industrial Recovery Act's Section 7a (the forerunner to the Wagner Act.) "God Almighty, that was it for us. Knew we needed a union. Had to have a union!" That week, he and another worker organized a secret meeting at a beer hall at 3966 Lindell. (The beer hall had been a speakeasy frequented by the auto workers during Prohibition.) Seventeen workers attended, vowing to return to the plant and organize it. Within a week, 900 workers attended a large meeting and signed up with the union. They organized as a federal labor union under the AFL. Federal labor unions were directly affiliated with the AFL and were considered to be temporary, until workers could be divided among the craft unions. But St. Louis GM workers were determined to remain together and organize on an industrial basis. By October, almost all of the 3,000 auto workers in Fisher Body and Chevrolet had joined the federal labor union. But GM fired or laid off all the main union activists during model change-over from 1933 to 1934.

Workers called for support from the AFL but were disappointed at the lackluster attention they received. "They generally considered us a bunch of young upstarts," remembers Livingston. In frustration, St. Louis workers formed the Federated Automobile Workers of America on March 29, 1934, creating a national union for auto workers. In April 1934, resolving to lead the way of all auto workers across the country, they demanded reinstatement of the fired workers and recognition of their union. When GM refused, St. Louis workers walked out, hoping that auto workers across the country would follow them. As GM hired strikebreakers and hauled them in cars and trucks across the picket line, fights broke out on Union Boulevard. Leo Stanford, a worker in the polishing department at Chevrolet, died after he was stabbed by a worker who crossed the picket line. GM fueled racial divisions by sending an open truck occupied by 30 black workers under police escort. The crowd of 2,000 strikers and sympathizers greeted them with showers of stones and half-bricks. Black workers picked up the objects and hurled them back as the truck sped away.

Two other auto assembly plants walked out with the St. Louis plant, but not the key Detroit and Flint plants. After two weeks, a government board stepped in and convinced the St. Louis workers that they would remedy their grievances and ensure the rehiring of key activists. Workers found, however, that the government's board acted in a weak fashion and did not address their demands for a union.

During the next 18 months, GM nationally spent at least \$1 million hiring private detectives to ferret out union sympathizers. John Livingston was "shadowed" for many months by a hired operator. The national auto union organized by the St. Louis workers collapsed and the local rejoined the AFL, although through contacts with Socialists in St. Louis, they conferred with auto workers in Detroit to create a small independent communications network. By 1936, only a handful of auto workers were willing to identify themselves with the union. But when workers in Flint, Mich., started their sit-down under the UAW-CIO, key auto activists in St. Louis responded. On Jan. 13, 1937, a group of community activists, miners from southern Illinois, auto workers from Kansas City, Emerson workers then in the final stages of organizing, relief activists and unionists in support of the CIO effort stood in front of the gates and appealed for Chevrolet and Fisher Body workers to join the nationwide strike. The majority of the people who joined the picket line that morning were not actually St. Louis auto workers. But 1,600 auto workers joined the union on that day. As the minutes of the union read, "On this day the workers in this plant showed the management they were determined to get justice." Workers shut down the plant and, a month later, the local auto industry became part of the historic GM-UAW agreement that brought collective bargaining to the auto industry.

Workers, hopeful that conditions would change rapidly in the industry, found instead that old habits died hard in the St. Louis Chevrolet plant. When they re-entered the plant on Feb. 16, hired "thugs" (one a confessed murderer) isolated union supporters and beat them with battery cables, chains and wooden bats. Workers came out of the plant and into the union hall with blood streaming down their faces. In response, the St. Louis Chevrolet workers staged sit-downs to draw public attention to the beatings and finally succeeded in forcing GM to cease the practice. These sit-downs helped to solidify the ranks of workers who had not really engaged in the strike for recognition to the same extent as did workers in other parts of the country.

Workers initially set up a strong shop steward system that resulted in a degree of power on the job that had been unheard-of before the union. In late 1937, Carl Copeland, a chief shop steward, in response to someone who argued that "money is the main topic of a union," replied: "That is where you are wrong. There are several things that come before money: Working conditions, health hazards, speed of the line and, most of all, your fellow workers."



Photo courtesy of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Chevrolet sit-downers enjoying refreshments brought into the plant. Behind the scenes was the hard work of supporters, especially women, who cooked the meals that sustained the men for the duration.

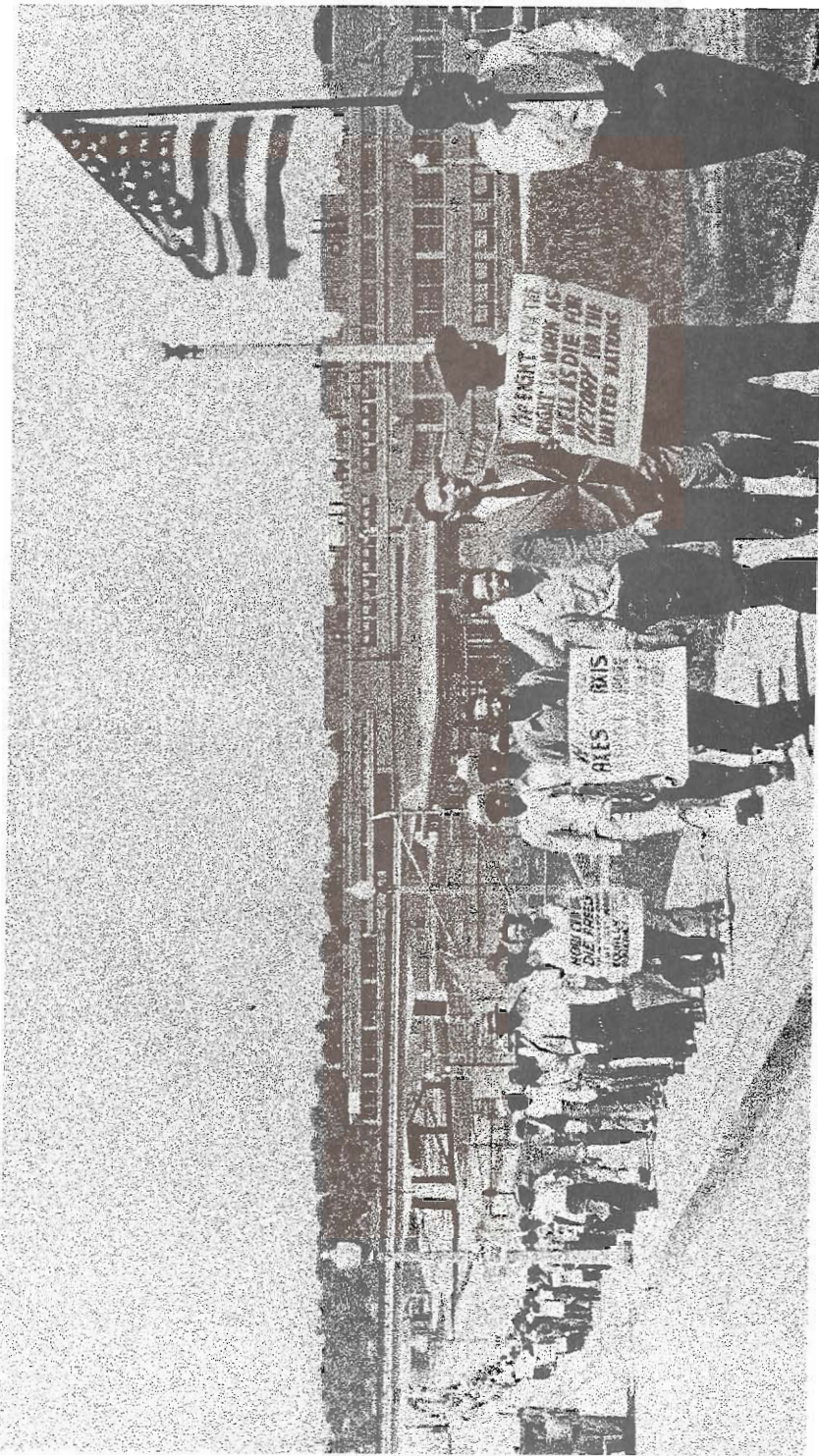


Photo courtesy of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch
A demonstration led by the March on Washington Movement demands jobs for African-Americans at the Small Arms plant, June 20, 1942.

Goodfellow and Bircher

WWII and the Remaking of the St. Louis Economy and the St. Louis Working Class

The Small Arms plant on Goodfellow in many ways represents the remaking of the St. Louis economy in that after World War II, St. Louis became a major defense contractor area. As a new working class drawn from southern states and rural areas joined second- and third-generation ethnic groups in the plant, work issues that remain relevant to the present were brought to the forefront at Small Arms.

During World War II, St. Louis became a leading center for war production. The largest plant here was Small Arms, run by U.S. Cartridge, which manufactured ammunition. Eventually almost 35,000 workers were employed there and it became the largest small-arms plant in the United States. Wartime opportunities attracted a rush of workers and resulted in overcrowded living conditions. At the time, there was not enough housing for these workers, who had to make do with living out of their cars and even worse conditions. Sixty percent of those employed were women, who faced lower wages for doing the same work as the men employed at the plant.

The drive by the company to attract labor outside of the area while black workers were still looking for work catalyzed the local formation of the March on Washington Movement. The MOWM was founded at the national level by A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, to demand that the government force companies to hire black workers during the war. Randolph had threatened a march on Washington, D.C., but withdrew the threat when President Roosevelt issued an executive order outlawing discriminatory practices. However, the order did not bring changes to Small Arms. By June 1942, about 20,000 workers had been hired at Small Arms — and only 600 African-Americans, mostly porters and laborers — while the company continued to advertise for white workers.

This discrimination launched the beginning of a local MOWM chapter. T.D. McNeal, international field organizer for the BSCP, had begun organizing a local chapter in May 1942. When in June 1942, Small Arms fired 200 black porters, the MOWM launched a drive against the small-arms plant. The 200 discharged porters joined the MOWM. Together with an array of other working class African-Americans and some white supporters, they staged a four-mile march to the plant to protest the discriminatory practices. They called for the company to cease importing “outside labor” until the available local supply was exhausted; for equal opportunity for blacks to take in-plant training and upgrading; the discontinuance of segregated restroom facilities; and the hiring of black women as well as men. The protest succeeded in forcing the company to hire black workers for production, but Small Arms set up a segregated facility for them. The MOWM continued to fight on these issues throughout the war, building their ranks with black workers and fighting similar discrimination by other companies.

The United Electrical Workers (the same union that had organized Emerson Electric) launched a union campaign at Small Arms that used African-American and women organizers. It expressed commitment to aiding the drive to integrate the Small Arms workforce. U.S. Cartridge’s top personnel were gathered from large anti-union corporations, and its management tried to use racial

divisions in order to stave off unionization of its facility. But in May 1943, the union won a representation election. Local 825 represented in many ways the best hopes of the CIO for the inclusion of blacks and women in its ranks. Its officers were committed to racial and gender equality. It fought for the integration of blacks on an equal basis and, with the continued pressure of the MOWM, began to succeed in this effort. It eliminated separate washroom facilities over the protests of some white workers. It fought not only for equal pay for equal work for women, but also for what we would now call “comparable worth” — bringing the pay for “women’s jobs” (jobs held only by women, and therefore paid less) up to the “men’s rate.” The contract also provided that women could train for any job in the plant. The union also was instrumental in the establishment of day nurseries for children of war workers.

Just as this progress was being made, waves of plant layoffs brought a racial and gender backlash. In December 1944, the local was “split wide open over the issue” of fully integrating black workers. When the executive board of the local refused to force the company to carry out a straight seniority provision (instead of separate seniority by department, race and gender) that had been approved by the membership, the progressive leadership of the local resigned in protest. Thereafter the local descended into factionalism and became ineffective.

By the end of the war in late 1945, Small Arms began to shut down. But the issues raised there would continue to plague St. Louis.

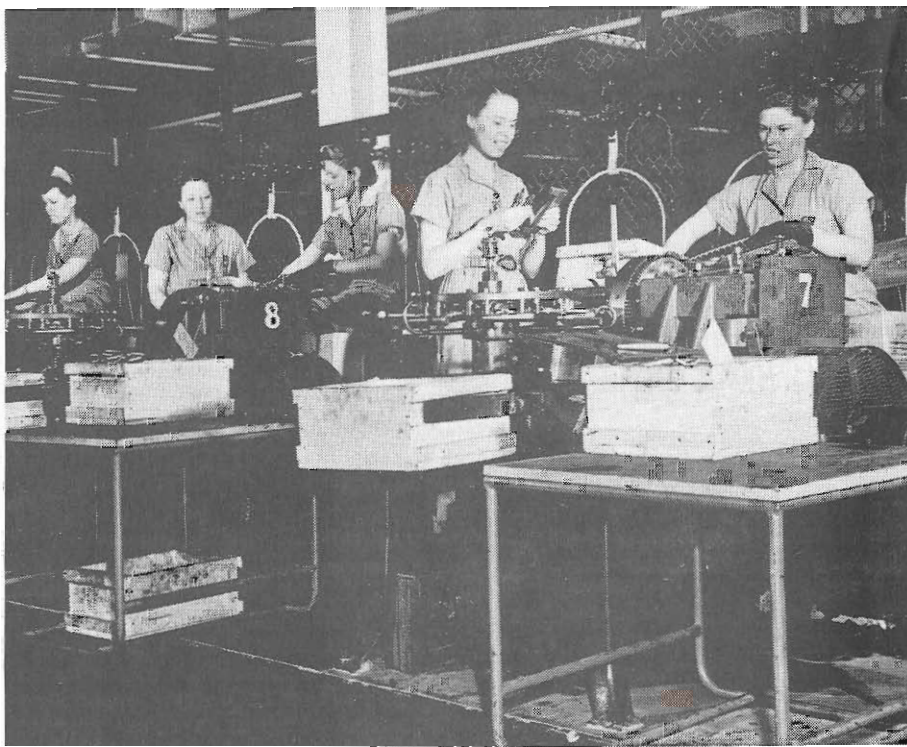


Photo courtesy Mercantile Library

Women workers on the bullet production line, Small Arms, 1943.

1408 North Kingshighway

Negro Labor Council's Campaign to Open Jobs at Sears Roebuck

by Rosemarv Feurer & Marilyn Slaughter

Many St. Louisans have heard of the Congress of Racial Equality demonstrations at Jefferson Bank in 1963, which opened up long-denied jobs to African Americans. Behind that campaign is a tradition of activism dating from the activities of the March-on-Washington Movement to end discrimination in the armed forces and defense industry during World War II. While the MOWM had disbanded after 1948, other working-class African-Americans and their allies continued to pursue the goal of economic and civil equality and to address the connections between the two. Ten years before CORE's Jefferson Bank protest, members of the St. Louis chapter of the National Negro Labor Council began an



Photo courtesy of W.E. 'Red' Davis

“Red” Davis (left) with sign that reads: “Negro Youth Die in Korea But Face Job Discrimination at Sears.”



Photo courtesy of W.E. 'Red' Davis

Hershel Walker leads a protest march against Sears.

intensive campaign to end the Jim Crow hiring policy of the Sears Roebuck store on North Kingshighway. In the 1950s, when civil rights organizations such as CORE had decided that any push for jobs for African-Americans would end in defeat, a small number of St. Louis workers were picketing Sears Roebuck for nine months, six nights a week, and they succeeded in their campaign to end the company's discriminatory hiring policy.

The St. Louis chapter of the National Negro Labor Council was organized by Hershel Walker and W. E. "Red" Davis. An African-American from a family of sharecroppers, Hershel Walker had come to St. Louis from Arkansas in 1929. Walker found little work but became active in the unemployed movement. He joined the Unemployed Councils then the Communist Party. In 1941 he went to work at the Small Arms Plant, and in 1942 took a job at Wagner Electric in Wellston, where he remained for the next 29 years. "Red" Davis was already a seasoned labor activist by the time of the Sears Roebuck campaign. He grew up in Memphis, Tenn., before leaving school in 10th grade to work on a riverboat. He joined the National Maritime Union in 1939 and through this activity and his own readings became deeply aware of the way that racism prevented the labor movement from realizing the ideal of solidarity. He became deeply committed to interracial solidarity. After World War II, Davis joined the Communist Party. He moved to St. Louis in 1951, found a job at Emerson Electric and soon met Hershel. They became close friends.

In 1951, Walker and Davis were delegates to the National Negro Labor Council convention in Detroit. The NNLC's mission was to fight racism in the community and the workplace. The organization's base was among black and white trade unionists, many of whom thought neither the AFL nor the CIO was doing enough to bring about interracial solidarity among working-class people. The national organization targeted Sears Roebuck, the largest retailer in the country, which at the time hired black workers only for janitorial positions. They sought to force Sears to set a standard for ethical hiring practices for other stores to follow.

When Davis and Hershel returned, they drew upon their experiences as union organizers and activists to start a St. Louis chapter of the Negro Labor Council. Joining the NNLC's campaign to fight Sears Roebuck's discriminatory hiring policies. Targeting the Sears store at 1408 N. Kingshighway Blvd. because it housed the Sears District Office as well as a store, the St. Louis chapter listed its goals in the *St. Louis Argus*:

"1) To bring full economic opportunity for the Negro workers in the factory, mine, mill and government.

"2) To buy and rent homes everywhere unrestricted; to use public facilities, such as restaurants, hotels, schools and recreational facilities all over the town and country.

"3) To unite all Negro workers with other suffering minorities and our allies among the white workers, and base ourselves on rank and file control regardless of age, sex, creed, political beliefs or union affiliations.

"4) To work unitedly with the trade unions to bring about greater cooperation between all sections of the Negro People and the trade union movement.

"5) To aid the trade unions in the great unfinished task of organizing the South on the basis of fraternity, equality, and unity."

In calling for full economic, social and political equality, the Negro Labor Council made the connection between civil rights and economic rights.

The campaign called upon all "fair-minded citizens" to stop buying at Sears until the store agreed to hire black sales and office workers. Picketers marched outside the Sears store with signs that read, "Don't Buy at Sears" and "Negro Youth Die in Korea But Face Job Discrimination At Sears." About 30 men and women, both black and white, participated in the campaign. Walker played an important role in drumming up support from the black community. Willie Head, the mayor of Kinloch, was on the picket line. So were black ministers and students from Sumner High School. Others included Orville Leach, a white Emerson Electric worker and John Papadamous, a graduate student at Washington University. Papadamous had been involved in the campaign to desegregate Washington University. They marched in front of the store, occasionally yelling through the doors. "Red" Davis remembers, "People would be at the counters buying stuff and we would yell in . . . 'end discrimination and hire blacks!'" Davis recalls that marchers thought they had some effect in persuading people not to buy at Sears. "We knew that it was working because about every two months the store management would call a meeting with us," he notes.

The Sears customers were not the only ones taking note of the protesters. The Federal Bureau of Investigation and local police also were interested. One day Davis discovered a policeman photographing the protestors from a nearby unmarked van: "You can always figure, whenever you see a van around the picket line, that's the cops, you know. They had a camera in there. And while walking around the picket line, I pounded on top of the van. These guys come running out, they thought a bomb had hit 'em! So I looked in the back window and they had a camera on a tripod sitting in there, making pictures of everybody on the picket line." After this incident, there was no use in being secretive: "They put the camera across the street, in the open. And they made pictures of everybody who came on the picket line." There were no major arrests or confrontations, except for a single scuffle. Davis recalls: "It was one of Hershel's sons, about 9 or 10 years old. The cop's name was 'Big Foot.' He pushed Hershel's son for no reason. My wife jumped on the cop's back, and Big Foot started to hit her with his club. The other protesters ran over to see what was going on. 'Big Foot' got scared and walked away."

The St. Louis Negro Labor Council sought the support of established civil rights organizations. But the National Association for the Advancement of Col-

ored People, the Urban League and CORE refused to participate in the campaign. The Negro Labor Council especially sought to secure the involvement of CORE, which was campaigning to force cafes and restaurants to open their doors to black patrons and was considered the most militant of the organizations. But CORE refused to join the Sears campaign because the Negro Labor Council was on the U.S. attorney general's "subversive" list, alleged to be dominated by the Communist Party. (Government employees were subject to investigation and firing if they belonged to any of the hundreds of organizations on the attorney general's list; the list was part of the repression of what is known as the McCarthy Era.) Civil rights organizations often were labelled "communist-influenced," and many decided to avoid any association with Communists. While Davis suggested Communists "had a great influence on the Sears protest because we were experienced organizers," most of the participants in the protests were not Communists. CORE — which had about as many members in St. Louis as the NLC and knew that employment issues were the key item on the civil rights agenda — nevertheless concluded that an employment campaign by an organization of their size could not accomplish anything.

But St. Louis and other NNLC chapters in cities such as Cleveland, New Jersey, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Indianapolis and Detroit, proved that with good strategic planning and organizing, a campaign could be successful in breaking down the Jim Crow hiring policy at Sears. Although they lacked the support of mainstream civil rights organizations, Walker got the Black Ministerial Alliance involved. "Hershel would gather up support from anyone that he could and we'd go into a meeting with the district superintendent at the Sears store on North Kingshighway on the third floor and we would meet," says Davis. After nine months, Sears finally entered into serious negotiations. "We had been talking to them all along but it was time for the serious stuff." Walker asked CORE and the other organizations to enter the negotiations. A letter signed by black ministers seeking CORE's support said "The store was about ready to crack and CORE could go in at this time and finish the job." CORE voted the proposal down unanimously. Nevertheless, a group from the Negro Labor Council negotiated with Sears management and, shortly thereafter, the first black women were hired at the store.



Photo courtesy of W.E. 'Red' Davis

A police photographer takes pictures of the Sears protestors.

Teamster Plaza:

Harold J. Gibbons and Teamsters Local 688 Progressive Unionism and St. Louis 1941-1973

—by Lon Smith

Harold Gibbons and Local 688 created a unique brand of progressive and community-based unionism that brought the local into the forefront of unions in the St. Louis area by the 1960s. While many people associate the Teamsters with a tough "bread-and-butter" unionism tainted by corruption, Gibbons was a maverick who challenged such labels and perceptions. He helped promote a style of unionism that avowed that "any local, state, or national problem affecting the social and civic well-being of our citizen-members is the concern of our union." Members of Local 688 were part of a movement dedicated to the rights of free human beings within a society that often was indifferent, unfair and



Photo courtesy the Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri-St. Louis
"The Road to Security" seemed possible in the 1950s, and Harold Gibbons (top, in plane) was determined that the union would provide it to workers.

unjust.

Gibbons was born in 1910, in Archibald Patch, Penn., the youngest of a family that included 25 children; his father was a dedicated member of the United Mine Workers Union. Following his father's death, the family moved to Chicago. There, Gibbons became exposed to labor-education courses and eventually, during the depths of the Great Depression, became a labor-education instructor himself. He organized and became president of the American Federation of Teachers local. During the CIO drive, he was hired as an organizer. After leading a number of successful sit-down strikes, Gibbons soon was named the CIO's assistant regional director in Chicago. Two years later, in 1939, he was named assistant midwest regional organizer for the CIO's textile workers' affiliate. Gibbons' experiences in these jobs — along with his short-lived membership in the Socialist Party and the influence of his wife Ann's socialist perspective — convinced Gibbons that unions should be concerned with more than only workplace issues.

Gibbons was assigned to St. Louis to head the CIO's Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Employees (RWDSEU) local unions. St. Louis then had more than 3,000 warehouses, some with only a small number of workers in their employ. Two thousand of these workers had organized into the CIO but by 1941, only 900 remained. Gibbons helped the small locals form a joint board to increase their organizing strength. Under his guidance, RWDSEU affiliates grew to more than 6,500 members in 1947. In 1949, the RWDSEU merged with Teamsters Local 688 and soon became Missouri's largest local union. Through consolidation and organizing drives, Gibbons created a power base for himself as a community leader, but he remained committed to union democracy and involved union members in the community.



Photo courtesy the Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri-St. Louis
Local 688 members on strike against Mavrakos Candy, 1952. By 1950, twenty percent of Local 688's members were women.

Because of Gibbons' social vision, thousands of Local 688 members enjoyed complete health care security for the first time in their lives. Gibbons was an ardent advocate of national health insurance, but as hopes for such federal legislation faded in the postwar era, Gibbons pushed forward with the Labor Health Institute. The LHI, which provided full medical and dental services to members and their families at Teamster Plaza, was financed totally by employer contributions. The LHI stressed preventive medicine. It became a model for other health maintenance organizations throughout North America.

Gibbons believed that trade unions had an obligation to represent the concerns of workers where they lived. Gibbons involved Local 688 in a number of community initiatives concerning housing and urban living conditions. The union supported the creation of the Metropolitan Sewer District, the Bi-State Developmental Agency (urban mass transit district), the Community College District of St. Louis and St. Louis County, the Mill Creek Urban Renewal Program, the Tandy Area Council, Missouri's Fair Employment Practices Law and the Public Accommodation Law. In the early 1950s, Local 688 created a community stewards program. Assigned to areas throughout St. Louis, Local 688 rank-and-file community activists "took up fellow citizens' grievances about the slow removal of fallen trees or garbage, the need for playgrounds, location of bus stops and the like." By the mid-1950s, the local had established community service centers throughout the city. One of their first successful actions was the enforcement of the city's rat-control ordinance in the slum sections, where many of the local's members resided.

Local 688 sought to represent the community interests of its African-American members. Ernest Calloway, an African-American, led the local efforts in this sphere and helped define Gibbons' commitment to civil rights, social unionism and rank-and-file democracy. The son of a coal miner from eastern Kentucky, Calloway had organized the Red Caps (porters) at Union Station in Chicago. Gibbons hired Calloway as his administrative assistant in 1950. Calloway, who gave up a Fulbright Scholarship to take the job with Local 688, set up the local research department and pressed for maximum rank-and-file participation to change "dues payers into active union members." Gibbons and Calloway involved Local 688 in a drive to desegregate public facilities in downtown St. Louis in the early 1950s. The local also embarked on a campaign to force the desegregation of the city's public school system in 1952 — a full two years before the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. Gibbons and other members of the local participated in the 1963 civil rights march on Washington and the Selma-to-Montgomery civil rights march in Alabama in 1965. In 1968, Gibbons was strategic to the successful settling of the St. Louis public housing rent strike.



Photo courtesy the Western Historical Manuscripts Collection, University of Missouri-St. Louis
Taxicab drivers, members of Local 688, on strike, 1953.

Conclusion

We hope the history related in this tour book has provided historical perspective on problems and possibilities that confront us today. It might be valuable to reflect on the journey from the broad aspirations reflected in the struggles at Turner Hall to the more narrow focus of the “progressive” unionism of Harold Gibbons and Teamsters’ Plaza. Because of the unique economic situation of the period in which Gibbons influenced Local 688, the union was able to construct a generous welfare system for thousands of St. Louis union members. But in the process, he, like many other progressives in the movement, abandoned the broader aspirations for demands for a national health care system. Now, as these special benefits are being challenged and the collective bargaining system that created them is no longer very functional, perhaps it is time to refocus our attention on creating a new labor movement rededicated to articulating working class people’s class demands such as the end to child labor and the shorter work week.

The history reflected in this book speaks to us even in the midst of the development of a new “global” economy. Some have suggested that focus on the community is insufficient to meet the problems facing workers and unions. But the history here suggests that solidarity is developed in face to face contact at the local level before it can be imagined at a broader level. In the 1930s, when workers sought a way to meet the power of large national corporations, the means by which they successfully did so was through building local networks of solidarity. Though we can’t exaggerate the level of inclusiveness achieved at the local level in the past—the pitfalls of racial and gender exclusion were evident there as well—the possibilities for building organizations reflective of all working people and their concerns must be realized at the local level before we can adequately address transnational corporations’ competitiveness agenda.

We wish to thank the following organizations for their financial or "in-kind" assistance to the project:

Actors' Equity, St. Louis District
Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union
(now UNITE) St. Louis Joint Board
Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 788
Coalition of Black Trade Unionists
Coalition of Labor Union Women
Communication Workers of America
Diekemper, Hammond, Shinnors, Turcotte and Larrew, P.C.
Feldacker and Cohen, P.C.
Illinois Education Association
University of Missouri Extension
International Ladies Garment Workers Union (now UNITE)
Central States Region
International Union of Electrical Workers, Local 1102
Missouri State AFL-CIO
Operating Engineers Local 148
Pelican Printing Company
Service Employees International Union, Local 50
Sheet Metal Workers Local 36
St. Louis Labor Council
St. Louis/Southern Illinois Labor Tribune
St. Louis LaborVision
Solidarity Labor Jam
Teamsters Local 600 Members and Retirees,
Teamsters Local 688 Executive Board, Staff and Members
United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 88
United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 655

To contact Bread and Roses, write

Bread and Roses
P.O. Box 63234
St. Louis, Missouri 63163



Pelican Printing Company
3035 Washington Ave., St. Louis, Missouri 63103