

Organized Labor

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The New Deal brought about an exciting time for organized labor, partly because they had found a friend in the Roosevelt administration that would allow the labor movement to obtain the momentum and legitimacy that it so desperately needed. These successes were brought about by unions like the AFL (American Federation of Labor) and CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations), mobilizing in order to provide a voice for labor interests. Due to the larger conflict between workers and management in the United States, it is important to set the stage for the organized labor movement of the 1930s.¹ This conflict arose as a response to the industry-driven United States falling victim to unregulated capitalism. In the late nineteenth century, businesses maximized profits by employing people who would work for the lowest possible wages under poor conditions.² As a result of this substandard environment, working conditions were often dangerous, and sleep deprived workers were forced to operate run-down machines for long hours. Employers faced no consequences for such harsh conditions, and organized labor in the form of unions had only a few strong advocates in the favor of the workers, and had little legitimacy at that time. Despite all of this, workers continued to find ways to organize and gain leverage over employers: laborers organized strikes, boycotts, and tried to find ways to

¹ "FDR and the Wagner Act," Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, Accessed January 11, 2016, <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/aboutfdr/wagneract.html>.

² *Ibid.*

limit the power of management.³ This still was not very effective in accomplishing the goals of labor, since factory owners rarely faced a shortage of people willing to work. Not only that, but employers continually found ways to undermine organized labor: employers with high inventory implemented lock-outs which forced the workers to find employment elsewhere, or forced employees to sign yellow dog contracts, which were essentially a pledge to the employer promising that the employee would never join a union. Factory owners also hired “scabs” (strikebreakers) to break up strikes, sit-ins, or walk-outs.⁴ Workers and employers reached an impasse because both believed they were fighting for their very existence. Workers faced dangerous, sometimes deadly conditions in the factory, and many employees were barely making enough to survive. The owners attempted to keep costs down in order to compete with manufacturers and to avoid being run out of business.

Organized labor also faced pressures from within the labor movement. This is most noticeable in the split between the CIO and the AFL. This divide was brought about by the CIO’s desire to organize all workers regardless of skill or by industry, while the AFL was an advocate of organizing skilled and semi-skilled workers on the basis of craft; unskilled labor was excluded in the AFL’s particular vision for organized labor.

The many successes achieved by labor in the 1930s arose partly as a response to the poor pay and working conditions the average factory worker experienced. Another factor, such as the terrible economic conditions, brought on by the Depression, encouraged the average worker to join a labor union. The Depression had poured water on the seeds of worker dissatisfaction, which lay at

³ “Labor Unions During the Great Depression and New Deal,” Library of Congress, Accessed January 20, 2016, <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/depwwii/unions/>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

the heart of the labor movement. Also, employers' attempts to thwart worker organization, along with the goals of the labor movement, played a crucial part in increasing working class unrest. Moreover, it was not until the Roosevelt Administration that the labor movement had a strong advocate on their behalf in the White House. Although labor had maintained allies in Congress among Democrats and Republicans, working class people had long awaited a public figure who could bring this issue to the forefront, especially since these "allies" in Washington faced tremendous opposition from corporations and from their colleagues.⁵ Labor's struggles of the late 1920s and early 1930s were brought about because many of labor's successes from 1917-1920 soon disappeared after World War One; this is because the organization of the economy in this period had more to do with creating a sustainably wartime economy than it had to do with giving working people what they were advocating.⁶ The Harding and Hoover administrations both engaged in further deregulation of the marketplace, and neither administration made the labor question a significant issue, at least in the public arena.⁷ The deregulation and the implementation of "trickle-down economics" during the 1920s manifested itself in massive levels of inequality, which led to deteriorating economic conditions because a large portion of the public had virtually lost its spending power. This caused employers to tighten their belts; the first thing on employers' chopping blocks were things that directly impacted the average worker. This resulted in layoffs (which would lead to mass unemployment), declining wages, and poorer working conditions, all of which then brought on further worker dissatisfaction. Because wealth at this time was concentrated at the top of the socioeconomic ladder, and current

⁵ Melvyn Dubofsky, *The State & Labor in Modern America* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 86.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

economic conditions were poor, employers and other wealthy individuals were deterred from investing, which certainly helped deepen the effects of the Depression because, after all, they were just about the only ones at this time with any significant spending power.

Given this analysis of the situation, that still leaves one with the question of how the labor movement was able to gain such significant ground in the 1930s. How did labor organize? The short answer, of course, is they had to. Occasionally very desperate situations can leave the door open for the potential of significant change. Thankfully, labor seized this great opportunity.

It is important not to underplay the role that the labor-friendly Roosevelt administration had in all of this. Economic instability as well as income inequality had remained at the center of the FDR presidency. It showed through the New Deal legislation, particularly the NIRA, the Wagner Act, and the Fair Labor Standards Act. Roosevelt faced tremendous opposition because he was challenging the traditional American idea that government should not have a role in the marketplace. Through his policies, he showed the American people that government can be capable of doing great things. Although his administration clearly overstepped the bounds of the Constitution, that does not mean what he implemented was inherently bad. From the very beginning, average working people knew that they had a friend in FDR, and he made it clear that he was a friend to them from the outset. By making these issues a priority, disenfranchised Americans felt like their voices and concerns were finally being heard. In FDR's acceptance speech for the Democratic Party nomination in Chicago in 1932, he said: "Give me your help, not only to win votes, but to win in this crusade to restore America to its own people."⁸

⁸ "In Roosevelt History," Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum Collections and Programs, Accessed January 16, 2016, <https://fdrlibrary.wordpress.com/tag/democratic-national-convention/>.

Thankfully the American people offered Roosevelt their help. The significance of this is two-fold. People now felt connected to the political process, and they believed that their efforts would bear fruit.

There is no doubt that FDR's stance encouraged labor activists to get involved and to create the grassroots mobilization that the movement needed. Labor leaders did just that. FDR offered a platform for labor so that its voice could be heard, and its issues be made significant. FDR sparked an upsurge in labor union activity, because unions and union members knew they had a president who was willing to act on their behalf. Out of all his speeches none was more powerful or inspirational than the one given announcing the Second New Deal in October of 1936. Roosevelt spoke of the troubles the nation faced, that led to the economic catastrophe the nation was now plagued by, saying:

For twelve years this Nation was afflicted with hear-nothing, see-nothing, do-nothing Government. The Nation looked to Government but the Government looked away. Nine mocking years with the golden calf and three long years of the scourge! Nine crazy years at the ticker and three long years in the breadlines! Nine mad years of mirage and three long years of despair! Powerful influences strive today to restore that kind of government with its doctrine that that Government is best which is most indifferent.⁹

He continued, "For nearly four years you have had an Administration which instead of twirling its thumbs has rolled up its sleeves. We will keep our sleeves rolled up."¹⁰ This was to ensure the American people that he would not follow in the passive footsteps of his predecessors, when a "do nothing government" allowed the problems that caused the collapse to happen. He asserted, "We had to struggle with the old enemies of peace—business and financial monopoly,

⁹ "Our Documents: The Second New Deal," Marist University FDR Library, Accessed January 15, 2016, <http://docs.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/od2ndst.html>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

speculation, reckless banking, class antagonism, sectionalism, war profiteering.”¹¹ FDR told the American people what they desperately needed to hear, whether they liked it or not, and said that the United States’ system had indeed become corrupt. Moreover, he said, “They had begun to consider the Government of the United States as a mere appendage to their own affairs. We know now that Government by organized money is just as dangerous as Government by organized mob.”¹² Finally, to show the people that he stood united with them, he declared, “Never before in all our history have these forces been so united against one candidate as they stand today. They are unanimous in their hate for me—and I welcome their hatred.”¹³ This was important, both for the administration and for labor, because the people of America who had become frustrated with a government that was not acknowledging the systemic problems the country faced were now receiving confirmation that those issues were being recognized.

Although words can be important and influential, in government it is policy that matters, and luckily FDR delivered on that front as well. Nelson Lichtenstein argues that through FDR’s New Deal legislation, the president emphasized the need for future security for Americans, or “The Second Bill of Rights,” which would, “provide citizens with the right to a job, medical care, education, housing, and a decent income.”¹⁴ President Roosevelt said, “The one supreme objective for the future can be summed up in one word: Security,” and moreover, “that means not only physical security which provides safety for attacks by aggressors. It also means economic security, social security, moral

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 30.

security.”¹⁵ According to Lichtenstein, this was inspired by the idea of an “industrial democracy,” a system that envisioned “a constitutionalization of factory governance and the growth of a two-party system that would put unions and managers on equal footing.”¹⁶ Sticking to this agenda, Roosevelt shepherded passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 (NIRA). The act was passed to help the nation recover from the depression and it sought to suspend anti-trust laws, set industry standards for fair competition, set prices and wages, give workers the right to collectively bargain, and ban yellow-dog, or anti-union contracts.¹⁷ Section 7(a), the clause which gave workers the right to bargain collectively, resulted in an upsurge in union activity. The passage of this act gave labor groups like the AFL room to operate effectively since the employer no longer could legally prevent workers from organizing. Although employers still engaged in tactics to prevent industry-wide unionization, particularly through forming company unions, according to historian Sidney Fine:

section 7(a) persuaded virtually all auto employers except Ford to establish employee representation plans in their plants to starve off the threat of auto unionism. Although Green regarded the company union as the A.F. of L.’s ‘greatest menace’ in the auto industry, it is difficult to evaluate the A.F. of L.’s complaint.¹⁸

Through a separate executive order Roosevelt set up the National Recovery Administration (NRA) as oversight to the NIRA. Fine notes that “the NRA was to set up as a board responsible to the President, composed of a labor representative, an industry representative, and a neutral. It was ‘to pass on all questions of representation, discharge and discrimination,’ and its decisions were

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁷ “National Industrial Recovery Act (1933),” Our Documents, accessed January 11, 2016, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=66>.

¹⁸ Sidney Fine, *The Origins of the United Automobile Workers, 1933-1935* (Detroit: University of Michigan-Wayne State University, Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, 1958).

to be final and binding on both sides.”¹⁹ Unfortunately for labor, the NIRA was soon declared unconstitutional.

The National Labor Relations Act was introduced in the Senate by Robert Wagner in 1934, and was later signed into law by President Roosevelt in June of 1935.²⁰ The act planned to “diminish the causes of labor disputes burdening or obstructing interstate and foreign commerce, to create a National Labor Relations Board, and for other purposes.”²¹ This developed in response to the NIRA being declared unconstitutional and to the opposition workers were still facing from employers in their efforts to unionize. Employers engaged in spying on their employees, breaking up strikes and sit-ins (sometimes with their own private police forces) as well as developing company unions to divert employees from organizing independently of the employer. The Wagner Act was to grant employees “the right to self-organization, to form, join, or assist labor organizations, to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and to engage in concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid and protection.”²² In order to enforce this as law, the act created the National Labor Relations Board to settle disputes between labor and the employer, as well as to investigate reports of “unfair labor practices” by the employer. According to the Wagner Act, “unfair practices” include: “interference, coercion, or restraint in labor’s self-organizing rights; interference with the formation of labor unions; encouragement or discouragement of union membership; and the refusal to bargain collectively with a duly chosen employee representatives.”²³ Lichtenstein argues that the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ “National Labor Relations Act (1935),” Our Documents, accessed January 11, 2016, <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=67>.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

Wagner Act was also drafted in a way that would “stamp out company unionism.”²⁴ In order to do this, “the new labor law banned any kind of management participation in or encouragement to a union, and it proscribed proportional representation, which would have allowed more than one union to represent workers in a given trade or company.”²⁵ Moreover, framers of the NLRA successfully argued against company unions “because such institutions would merely perpetuate managerial power and exacerbate social divisions in the workforce.”²⁶ Although, as Melvin Dubofsky points out, Wagner did not have a problem with company unions as a matter of free choice, the bill put an end to “employer dominated” unions.²⁷ He says that the intention of Wagner’s proposal was not to permit industrial conflict, but to “eliminate the causes of strikes not to induce workers to strike.”²⁸ The bill was later upheld by the Supreme Court in 1937, giving unions and employees legal ground to stand on when engaging in negotiating with the employer. It also outlawed some “unfair practices” used by employers to discourage worker dissent.

Finally, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 outlawed child labor, established an eight-hour work day, overtime pay, and a federal minimum wage. Some of the original dreams of the labor movement had been realized, and perhaps the most significant was the eight-hour work day, which originated from the concept that people should have the right to eight hours’ work, eight hours’ rest, and eight hours’ recreation. Roosevelt faced tremendous opposition from Southern Democrats over the bill; David Kennedy argues that “high principle orthodox southern thinking [was] that low wages were the South’s

²⁴ Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 38.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Melvyn Dubofsky, *The State & Labor in Modern America* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 127.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

major perhaps only – advantage in competition with more efficient northern industries.”²⁹ The concerns of Southern Democrats were certainly warranted because twenty percent of their workers earned below what would become the federally mandated minimum wage.³⁰ However, Roosevelt saw this as the problem: “Cheap wages mean low buying power... and let us remember that buying power means many other kinds of things, better schools, better health, better hospitals, better highways.”³¹ It is clear that Roosevelt was clearly an advocate of the labor movement, and it demonstrates that through his administration’s policy proposals. While his role was not the end all be all to the labor movement, he did play a crucial part. Certainly if there was an establishment candidate in the White House, it is hard to fathom any of this legislation being signed into law.

Also integral to achieving the goals of the labor movement in the 1930s was the work done by labor groups. The AFL and the CIO were crucial in the organizing of labor. Without these organizations it is difficult to see labor achieving any of its goals. These organizations played an important role on the grassroots level, from recruiting workers to join unions, organizing strikes, walkouts, and sit-ins, or just the role of giving workers a voice by forming clear and organized objectives for the movement. A split between the two large unions occurred in the 1930s because the CIO worked to organize workers by industry, rather than practice traditional craft unionism like the AFL.³² Despite the need for

²⁹ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 345.

³⁰ "Fair Labor Standards Act," Society for Human Resource Management, accessed January 11, 2016, <http://www.shrm.org/legalissues/federalresources/federalstatutesregulationsandguidanc/pages/fairlaborstandardsactof1938.aspx>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Christopher L. Tomlins, “AFL Unions in the 1930s: Their Performance in Historical Perspective,” *The Journal of American History* 65 (1979): 1024.

industrial organizations it was the craft unions of the AFL that had the bulk of organized labor membership at this time; moreover, as Christopher Tomlins points out, even though they lost membership between 1936 and 1937, the AFL “had exhibited a tendency to alter both organizing strategies and institutional structures to accommodate changes in the industrial environment in which they operated.”³³ However, it is also necessary to point out that throughout the 1930s, the AFL and its leaders “seemed both unwilling and unable to wage the necessary fight.”³⁴ The organizational structure of the AFL still proved effective for mobilizing and advocating for workers through the creation of specific departments: “The departments gave unions that were active in a particular industry a structure through which they could coordinate their activities, and thus complemented the organization of all crafts in an industry around the paramount craft or trade.”³⁵ The creation of these “departments” bureaucratized the AFL, making it less effective.³⁶ Tomlins provides specific examples where the AFL was able to implement structural changes to accommodate the changes in industry in the 1930s: The International Union of Operating Engineers’, “responded to a widening product market... of highway construction industry with a policy of centralization.”³⁷ Also the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen, when faced with employer “hostility,” responded with “decentralizing and organizing retail butchers.”³⁸ The IAM (of southern railroad metal workers) “claimed early jurisdiction over all skilled machinists,” and the AFL then granted the jurisdiction in those sectors.³⁹ Despite its successes in these

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 39.

³⁵ Tomlins, “AFL Unions in the 1930s,” 1021.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

particular areas the AFL still struggled in organizing semi-skilled or unskilled labor.

The CIO, however, achieved great success in organizing semi-skilled or unskilled workers. This is just what President and partial CIO founder, John L. Lewis, had envisioned from the outset. His fear was that many working people (specifically semi-skilled or unskilled) would be left behind by the more traditional craft unionism because most industry was still nonunion. Lewis was able to foresee that as technology and industry advanced that skilled jobs would soon become semi-skilled, and then in turn, semi-skilled jobs would soon become unskilled; thus the importance of industrial unionism. As Lichtenstein points out, Lewis of the United Mine Workers and Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers:

thought the organization of all workers, regardless of skill or tradition, the most effective basis for the growth of labor's power in the mass production industries. But even more important, they broke with the rest of the AFL because they thought that the passage of the Wagner Act, the insurgent mood within the working class, and the increasingly anti-business tenor of the White House meant that there would never be a better time to unionize industrial workers and push the New Deal toward the kind of social democratic politics and policies they favored. If unions led by men such as themselves could seize this opportunity, then organized labor would multiply its membership, economic power, and political clout.⁴⁰

The CIO was filling a void in the labor movement that was not being filled by the AFL. Dubofsky argues that, "As conservative business-financed opposition to the New Deal intensified, Roosevelt increasingly looked to workers and their labor movement for mass support."⁴¹ Moreover, notable labor leaders, "realized that the president's political needs opened vast possibilities for a dynamic trade

⁴⁰ Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 43.

⁴¹ Dubofsky, *The State & Labor in Modern America*, 137.

union movement.”⁴² John L. Lewis knew that given the strong opposition the movement faced, it would have to act militantly and, “most AFL leaders, however proved too indecisive to act militantly.”⁴³

One of the most notable of CIO victories was the settlement reached between the UAW (United Auto Workers) and GM in 1937. Given the current political and economic climate of 1936-1937: Roosevelt’s landslide victory in his reelection, the early victory of the CIO with the URW, the beginning of their steel campaign, “energized auto activists;” the economy took a turn for the better which caused “expanding sales” to “tighten labor markets, making the companies more vulnerable to pressure.”⁴⁴ Historian Robert Zieger points out that, “The Roosevelt Campaign, with Lewis eloquently aligning the industrial union movement with the revered president while auto industry magnates ostentatiously financed the Republicans and openly reviled the New Deal, sharpened the ‘us versus them’ feelings of the autoworkers.”⁴⁵ Soon after, union leaders and labor activists got workers to apply pressure on the employer in the factories and body plants in Detroit. The workers seized control of Fischer Body Plants by December 1936 by organizing quickie strikes, walkouts, and sit-ins.⁴⁶ Although the occupation of the factory itself can much be credited to the UAW, the strike and the negotiations that followed then CIO spokesman John L. Lewis “performed brilliantly.”⁴⁷ Lewis knew that politicians, interest groups, and corporations respond only to one thing: power. Given that workers had occupied the body plants, and given the current political-economic climate that the labor

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Robert H. Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1995) 49.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 50

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 51

movement had some power, Lewis did not shy away from exercising his authority. Despite the power Lewis and the UAW wielded in the situation with GM, GM still only agreed to “negotiate” if the strikers left, and offered nothing in the form of permanent recognition of the UAW. Lewis, “would have none of it”; he wasn’t looking for any concessions from GM in terms of wages or factory conditions. He wanted one thing from GM, for them to recognize the UAW as “the only legitimate labor organization in the plants affected by the strike,” to give the workers the ability to legitimately negotiate with the employer.⁴⁸ Nelson Lichtenstein points out that,

The signed contract was but four pages long, but it proved a remarkable victory, not only for the employees of America’s largest corporation, but for millions of other worker. GM recognized the union as the sole voice of its employees and agreed to negotiate with UAW leaders on a multi-plant basis. This meant that union activists had for the first time the right to speak up, recruit other workers, and complain to management without fear of retribution. “Even if we got not one damn thing out of it other than that,” declared a GM employee in St Louis, “we at least had a right to open our mouths without fear.”⁴⁹

The ability to speak up manifested itself in widespread working class liberation and confidence.⁵⁰ This was integral to yet another important factor to the organized labor movement: worker participation.

The mid 1930s marked an upsurge in union activity. In 1937 alone, unions recruited over three million members, growing by nearly 100 percent, and unions now held 23 percent of the country’s non-agricultural workers, “the greatest proportion as yet unionized in American history.”⁵¹ This increase in union activity also resulted in an increase in worker participation in demonstrations in

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 52

⁴⁹ Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 51.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

⁵¹ Dubofsky, *The State & Labor in Modern America*, 137.

order to pressure employers. Without these demonstrations it is hard to believe that the employers of corporations would have felt the need to comply, recognize, and negotiate with these unions, and workers felt compelled to participate because they felt that organizations, like the CIO, would properly represent and fight for them.⁵² To give a feel for the importance of worker organization and labor unions, Bill Knox talked with young laborers about the importance of unionization during an interview. Knox says:

He says they were after him to join the union and he says what the hell should he join for? Says he was satisfied with his job and everything, why should he join? Says when all the rest of 'em came in, then he'd do it too, and not before...But I says, how do you know where you'll stand a year from today? You ain't got no protection, I says, if they decide to cut your pay, or somethin', what are you gonna do? You just got to take it...So I says, I know what I'm talking about. It's the only protection for a workin' man. The big fellas don't give a damn for you and the only way you can talk turkey to them is to organize.⁵³

Knox was right. The only way to effectively negotiate with the employer to show them that the workers mean business, and the only way to do that was to organize and to apply pressure.

No worker strike during this period was more notable, or perhaps more successful, than the one at Flint, Michigan in 1937. Flint also provides a great example of the importance of worker mobilization being an effective tool to compel the employer to negotiate. Michael Torigian points out that, "neither before nor since has labor achieved comparable influence," and that, "sit-in strikes at Flint, Michigan defeated the open shop at General Motors corporation,

⁵² Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955*, 51.

⁵³ "Bill Knox Advises Young Laborers About Unions," Library of Congress, Accessed January 20, 2016
<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentation/s/timeline/depwwii/unions/knox.html>.

opening the way to the subsequent unionization of America's mass production sector."⁵⁴ The occupation at Flint would not have been possible without the mobilization of hundreds of labor activists in their effort to unionize American auto industry. As Torigian argues, only a small percentage of the factory workers at Flint were a part of the UAW.⁵⁵ However, the small percentage were resilient and committed to the cause of industrial unionism, and also represented the interests of many more workers than their numbers would suggest. Robert Zieger says of the strikers that:

The sit-downers displayed remarkable élan, comradeship, and solidarity. They fought off police assaults by turning fire hoses on the attackers and by hurling heavy door hinges and tools from second-floor windows. They organized entertainment and exercise programs. They turned car bodies and seats into bedrooms. In their act of protest, they recovered some of the human connection that mass production industry had systematically leached out of the work experience. Declared one sit-downer, "It was like we were soldiers holding the fort. It was like war. The guys with me became my buddies."⁵⁶

The willingness of the militant factory occupiers to face employer opposition proved effective in securing a victory at Flint in 1937 and elsewhere. This highlights the importance of worker mobilization, if employers did not think workers were willing to fight for what they wanted, why would the employers give them what they were asking for?

Despite the opposition from business interests, and policy-makers in Washington the labor movement of the 1930s was still able to achieve significant victories. As with anything else, labor's ability to organize and bring about change through policy was caused by a mixture of many factors. The poor

⁵⁴ Michael Torigian, "The Occupation of the Factories: Paris 1936, Flint 1937," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41 (1999): 324–347.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955*, 51.

economic conditions brought on by the Depression created a climate of working class unrest. Dissatisfied working-individuals concerns were answered, or at the very least acknowledged by FDR and his New Deal legislation. Thus, this opened the door for interest groups like the AFL and the CIO to influence employers and organize workers within a legal framework. Mobilized and militarized labor activists worked in applying pressure on employers' in order to negotiate for better pay and working conditions. More than anything else, the labor movement was about including workers in the process of conducting business, and it is safe to say, they achieved that goal. Providing this safety net for workers went a long way in helping create a strong sustainable middle class, as well as improving pay and working conditions in factories. It is a wonder if this would have been possible without organized labor's achievements of the 1930s.