

Twenty years of the CIO

Labor's Giant Step

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Three Strikes That Paved the Way

The National Industrial Conference Board, in a survey of collective bargaining under the NRA, could boast in March 1934 of "the relatively small proportion of employees found to be dealing with employers through an organized labor union." At the same time, said the board, "Employee representation [company unions] appears to have made considerable progress" and "it is clear that individual bargaining has not in any way been eliminated by Section 7(a) of the Recovery Act."

In that same month, the *American Federationist*, organ of the top AFL leadership, complained: "In general there has been no increase in real wages...The codes will not safeguard real wages...The government monetary policy points toward diminishing real wages."

Worst of all, the wave of strikes following the enactment of NRA in June 1933 was ending in a series of defeats. Where the union leaders themselves did not rush the workers back on the job without gains—not even union recognition, the strikes were smashed by court injunctions and armed violence. Behind the legal restraining orders and the shotguns, rifles and machine guns of police, deputies and National Guardsmen, the scabs and strikebreakers were being herded into struck plants almost at will.

It was at this stage, when strike after strike was being crushed, that the Toledo Electric Auto-Lite Company struggle blazed forth to illuminate the whole horizon of the American class struggle. The American workers were to be given an unforgettable lesson in how to confront all the agencies of the capitalist government — courts, labor boards and armed troops—and win.

Toledo, Ohio, an industrial city of about 275,000 population in 1934, is a glass and auto parts center. In June 1931, four Toledo

banks had closed their doors. Some of the big local companies, including several suppliers to the auto industry, had secretly transferred their bank accounts to one big bank. These companies did not get caught in the crash.

But thousands of workers and small business men did. They lost their lives' savings. One out of every three persons in Toledo was thrown on relief, standing in lines for food handouts at a central commissary. In 1933, the Unemployed League, led by followers of A. J. Muste, head of the Conference for Progressive Labor Action (later the American Workers Party), had organized militant mass actions of the unemployed and won cash relief. The League made it a policy to call for unity of the unemployed and employed workers; it mobilized the unemployed not to scab, but to aid all strikes.

On February 23, 1934, the Toledo Auto-Lite workers, newly organized in AFL Federal Local 18384, went on strike. This was quickly ended by the AFL leaders with a truce agreement for negotiations through the Regional Labor Board of the National Labor Board, which had been set up under the NRA.

Refusing to be stalled further by the labor board or to submit to the special Auto Labor Board, which Roosevelt had set up in March to sidetrack pending auto strikes and which had upheld company unionism, the Auto-Lite workers went on the picket lines again on April 13.

The company followed the usual first gambit in such a contest. It went to a friendly judge and got him to issue an injunction limiting picketing. The strike had begun to die on its feet when a committee of Auto-Lite workers came to the Unemployed League and asked for aid. What happened then was described shortly thereafter by Louis F. Budenz, in the previously cited collection of articles, *Challenge to the New Deal*, edited by Alfred Bingham and Selden Rodman. This is the same Budenz who about a year later deserted to the Stalinists, served them for ten years and finally wound up as an informer for the FBI against radicals.

However, at the time of the Auto-Lite strike, Budenz was still an outstanding fighter for labor's rights and civil liberties. He had edited *Labor Age* during the Twenties and had led great battles against strikebreaking injunctions at Kenosha, Wisconsin, and Nazareth, Pennsylvania. It was he who suggested the tactic for breaking the injunction and he had addressed the thousands massed on the picket line after the injunction was smashed. While he was still uncorrupted, Budenz wrote about the Auto-Lite battle:

"The dynamic intervention of a revolutionary workers organization, the American Workers Party, seemed to have been required

before that outcome [a union victory] could be achieved. The officials in the Federal Automobile Workers Union would have lost the strike if left to their own resources.

"The merit of this particular AFL union was that it did strike. The Electric Auto-Lite and its two affiliated companies, the Logan Gear and Bingham Stamping Co., were involved. But when the company resorted to the injunction, the union officers observed its terms. In less than three weeks, under protection of the court decree, the company had employed or otherwise secured 1800 strikebreakers in the Auto-Lite alone.

"That would have been the end, and another walkout of the workers would have gone into the wastebasket of labor history. The Lucas County Unemployed League, also enjoined, refused however to let the fight go in that way. Two of its officers, Ted Selander and Sam Pollock, [and several auto local members] wrote [May 5, 1934] Judge R. R. Stuart, advising him that they would violate the injunction by encouraging mass picketing. They went out and did so. They were arrested, tried and released—the court warning them to picket no more. They answered by going directly from court, with all the strikers and unemployed league members who had been present, to the picket line. Through the mass trials, Selander and Pollock got out a message as to the nature of the capitalist courts. The picket line grew."

The unexampled letter sent by the local Unemployed League to Judge Stuart deserves to be preserved for posterity. It is an historic document that ranks in its way with the great declarations of human freedom more widely known and acclaimed. The letter read:

May 5, 1934

His Honor Judge Stuart
County Court House
Toledo, Ohio

Honorable Judge Stuart:

On Monday morning May 7, at the Auto-Lite plant, the Lucas County Unemployed League, in protest of the injunction issued by your court, will deliberately and specifically violate the injunction enjoining us from sympathetically picketing peacefully in support of the striking Auto Workers Federal Union.

We sincerely believe that this court intervention, preventing us from picketing, is an abrogation of our democratic rights, contrary to our constitutional liberties and contravenes the spirit and the letter of Section 7a of the NRA.

Further, we believe that the spirit and intent of this arbitrary injunction is another specific example of an organized movement to curtail the rights of all workers to organize, strike and picket effectively.

Therefore, with full knowledge of the principles involved and the possible consequences, we openly and publicly violate an injunction which, in our opinion, is a suppressive and oppressive act against all workers.

Sincerely yours,

Lucas County Unemployed League
Anti-Injunction Committee

Sam Pollock, Sec'y

By May 23, there were more than 10,000 on the picket lines. County deputies with tear gas guns were lined up on the plant roof. A strike picket, Miss Alma Hahn, had been struck on the head by a bolt hurled from a plant window and had been taken to the hospital. By the time 100 more cops arrived, the workers were tremendously incensed. Police began roughing up individual pickets pulled from the line. What happened when the cops tried to escort the scabs through the picket line at the shift-change was described by the Associated Press.

"Piles of bricks and stones were assembled at strategic places and a wagon load of bricks was trundled to a point near the factory to provide further ammunition for the strikers. . . Suddenly a barrage of tear gas bombs was hurled from upper factory windows. At the same time, company employes armed with iron bars and clubs dragged a fire hose into the street and played water on the crowd. The strike sympathizers replied with bricks, as they choked from gas fumes and fell back."

But they retreated only to reform their ranks. The police charged and swung their clubs trying to clear a path for the scabs. The workers held their ground and fought back. Choked by the tear gas fired from inside the plant, it was the police who finally gave up the battle. Then the thousands of pickets laid siege to the plant, determined to maintain their picket line.

The workers improvised giant slingshots from inner tubes. They hurled whole bricks through the plant windows. The plant soon was without lights. The scabs cowered in the dark. The frightened deputies set up machine guns inside every entranceway. It was not until the arrival of 900 National Guardsmen, 15 hours later, that the scabs were finally released, looking a "sorry sight," as the press reported it.

Then followed one of the most amazing battles in U. S. labor history. "The Marines had landed" in the form of the National Guard but the situation was not "well in hand." With their bare fists and rocks, the workers fought a six-day pitched battle with the National Guard. They fought from rooftops, from behind billboards and came through alleys to flank the guardsmen. "The men in the mob shouted vile epithets at the troopers," complained the Associated Press, "and the women jeered them with suggestions that they 'go home to mama and their paper dolls.'"

But the strikers and their thousands of sympathizers did more than shame the young National Guardsmen. They educated them and tried to win them over. Speakers stood on boxes in front of the troops and explained what the strike was about and the role the troops were playing as strikebreakers. World War I veterans put on their medals and spoke to the boys in uniform like "Dutch uncles." The women explained what the strike meant to their families. The press reported that some of the guardsmen just quit and went home. Others voiced sympathy with the workers. (A year later, when Toledo unionists went to Defiance, Ohio, to aid the Pressed Steel Company strike, they found that eight per cent of the strikers had been National Guardsmen serving in uniform in the Auto-Lite strike. That was where they learned the lesson of unionism.)

On May 24, the guardsmen fired point-blank into the Auto-Lite strikers ranks, killing two and wounding 25. But 6,000 workers returned at dusk to renew the battle. In the dark, they closed in on groups of guardsmen in the six-block martial law zone. The fury of the onslaught twice drove the troops back into the plant. At one stage, a group of troops threw their last tear gas and vomit gas bombs, then quickly picked up rocks to hurl at the strikers; the strikers recovered the last gas bombs thrown before they exploded, flinging them back at the troops.

On Friday, May 31, the troops were speedily ordered withdrawn from the strike area when the company agreed to keep the plant closed. This had not been the usual one-way battle with the workers getting shot down and unable to defend themselves. Scores of guardsmen had been sent to the hospitals. They had become demoralized. By June 1, 98 out of 99 AFL local unions had voted for a general strike.

A monster rally on the evening of June 1 mobilized some 40,000 workers in the Lucas County Courthouse Square. There, however, the AFL leaders, frightened by this tremendous popular uprising, were silent about the general strike and instead assured the workers that Roosevelt would aid them.

By June 4, with the whole community seething with anger, the com-

pany capitulated and signed a six-month contract, including a 5% wage increase with a 5% minimum above the auto industry code, naming Local 18384 as the exclusive bargaining agent in the struck plants. This was the first contract under the code that did not include "proportional representation" for company unions. The path was opened for organization of the entire automobile industry. With the Auto-Lite victory under their belts, the Toledo autoworkers were to organize 19 plants before the year was out and, before another 12 months, were to lead the first successful strike in a GM plant, the real beginning of the conquest of General Motors.

While the Auto-Lite strike was reaching its climax, the truck drivers of Minneapolis were waging the second of a series of three strikes which stand to this day as models for organization, strategy and incorruptible, militant leadership.

Minneapolis, with its twin city St. Paul, is the hub of Minnesota's wheat, lumber and iron ore areas. Transport—rail and truck—engages a relatively large number of workers. In early 1934, Minneapolis was a notoriously open-shop town. The Citizens Alliance, an organization of anti-union employers, ruled the city.

On February 7, 8 and 9, 1934, the Citizens Alliance got the first stunning blow that was to shatter its dominance. Within three days the union of coal yard workers, organized within General Drivers Local Union 574, AFL International Brotherhood of Teamsters, had paralyzed all the coal yards and won union recognition. The *Minneapolis Labor Review*, February 16, 1934, hailed "the masterly manner in which the struggle was conducted...there has never been a better example of enthusiastic efficiency than displayed by the coal driver pickets."

The February 24, 1934 *Militant* reported that Local 574 "displayed a well organized, mobile, fighting picket line that stormed over all opposition, closed 65 truck yards, 150 coal offices and swept the streets clear of scabs in the first three hours of the strike."

The most painstaking and detailed preparation had gone into this strike. The organizers were a group of class-conscious socialists, Trotskyists who had been expelled from the Stalinized Communist Party in 1928, and workers sympathetic to the Trotskyist point of view. Soon their names were to ring throughout the whole northwest labor movement and make national headlines. They included the three Dunne brothers—Vincent, Grant and Miles—and Carl Skoglund, later to head 574.

"One of the outstanding features of the strike," the original *Militant* report stated, "was the Cruising Picket Squad. This idea came from the ranks and played a great role in the strike." This "cruis-

ing picket squad" was the original of the "flying squadrons" that were to become part of the standard picketing techniques of the great CIO strikes.

The late Bill Brown, then president of 574, revealed another important aspect of the coal yards battle. "I wrote Daniel Tobin, international president of the union for an OK [to strike]. Two days after the strike was over, he wrote back that we couldn't strike. By that time we'd won and had a signed contract with increased pay."

The Dunne brothers, Skoglund and their associates proved to be a different and altogether superior breed of union leaders compared to the type represented by the craft-minded bureaucrats of the AFL who were content to build a little job-holding trust and settle down for life to collecting dues. After the first victory they set out to organize every truck driver and every inside warehouse worker in Minneapolis. A whirlwind organizing campaign had recruited 3,000 new members into Local 574 by May.

On Tuesday, May 15, 1934, after the employers had refused even to deal with the union, the second truck drivers strike began. Now 5,000 strong, the organized drivers and warehousemen promptly massed at a large garage which served as strike headquarters. From there, fleets of pickets went rolling by trucks and cars to strategic points.

All trucking in the city was halted except for milk, ice and beer drivers who were organized and who operated with special union permits. The city was isolated from all truck traffic in or out by mass picketing. For the first time anywhere in connection with a labor struggle, the term "flying squads" was used—the May 26, 1934 *Militant* reported: "Flying squads of pickets toured the city."

The Local 574 leaders warned the membership over and over to place no reliance or hope in any government agents or agencies, including Floyd B. Olsen, the Farmer-Labor Party governor, and the National Labor Board. They preached reliance only on the mass picket lines and militant struggle against the employers.

From the start, the strike leaders summoned the whole working-class populace to their support. The very active unemployed organization responded at once. A 574 Women's Auxiliary, with a large membership, plunged into the strike, doing everything from secretarial work and mimeographing, to running the huge strike kitchen and manning picket trucks.

Some 700 of them marched in a mass demonstration to the Mayor's office to demand the withdrawal of the "special" police. The march was led by Mrs. Grant Dunne, auxiliary president, and Mrs. Farrell Dobbs, auxiliary secretary and wife of a young coal

driver who was a strike picket dispatcher. A decade later Farrell Dobbs became editor of *The Militant* and then national secretary of the Socialist Workers Party.

The Citizens Alliance had called a mass meeting of small business men, junior executives and similar elements and steamed them up for an armed attack on the strikers. They were urged to become "special deputies" and strikebreakers.

They selected the City Market, where farm produce was brought, as the center of the struggle. The sheriff moved in deputies to convoy farm trucks in and out of the market square. The pickets were able to halt all but three trucks. Brutal terror was then the answer to the strikers.

"The Mayor doubled the police force, then tripled it," reported the May 26, 1934 *Militant*. "Gunmen were imported to get after the leaders of the strike. Determined attempts were made to break through the picket lines on Friday night and Saturday. Two hundred arrests were made. . . Saturday night the 'regulars' and 'special' police rushed a truck load of women on the 'newspaper row' and beat them unmercifully, sending five to the hospital."

The next day some 35,000 building trades workers declared a strike in sympathy with the truck drivers. The Central Labor Union voted its support. Workers, many from plants which weren't even organized, stayed off their jobs and flocked to join the pickets.

On May 21 and 22 there was waged a two-day battle in the City Market that ended with the flight of the entire police force and special deputies in what was called by the strikers "The Battle of Deputies Run."

Word had come to the strike headquarters that the police and bosses were planning a "big offensive" to open the City Market to scab trucks on Monday and Tuesday. The strike leaders pulled in their forces from outlying areas and began concentrating them in the neighborhood of the market.

On Monday, a strong detachment of pickets was sent to the market. These pickets managed to wedge between the deputized business men and the police, isolating the "special deputies." One of the strikers, quoted in Charles Walker's *American City*, a stirring and generally reliable study of the Minneapolis struggle, described the ensuing battle:

"Then we called on the pickets from strike headquarters [reserve] who marched into the center of the market and encircled the police. They [the police] were put right in the center with no way out. At intervals we made sallies on them to separate a few. This kept up for a couple of hours, till finally they drew their guns. We

had anticipated this would happen, and that then the pickets would be unable to fight them. You can't lick a gun with a club. The correlation of forces becomes a little unbalanced. So we picked out a striker, a big man and utterly fearless, and sent him in a truck with twenty-five pickets. He was instructed to drive right into the formation of cops and stop for nothing. We knew he'd do it. Down the street he came like a bat out of hell, with his horn honking and into the market arena. The cops held up their hands for him to stop, but he kept on; they gave way and he was in the middle of them. The pickets jumped out on the cops. We figured by intermixing with the cops in hand-to-hand fighting, they would not use their guns because they would have to shoot cops as well as strikers. Cops don't like that.

"Casualties for the day included for the strikers a broken collar bone, the cut-open skull of a picket who swung on a cop and hit a striker by mistake as the cop dodged, and a couple of broken ribs. On the other side, roughly thirty cops were taken to the hospital."

The strikers were victorious in another sense: no trucks moved.

The next day, the showdown came. The bosses' private army of 2,200 "special deputies," plus virtually the entire police force, were mobilized in the market place to break the strike at its central point. A striker gave the following account in the June 2, 1934 *Militant*:

"A skeleton patrol was sent to patrol the market streets and to report any move to start delivery. Word quickly comes back; hundreds of special deputies, special police and harness bulls armed with clubs and guns, squad cars of police with sawed-off shot guns and vomiting gas... A truck starts to move, but pickets jump to the running boards and demand that the scab driver stop. A hired slugger raises his club and slashes at a picket. Down the picket drops as if dead. The fight is on.

"Phone rings at the concentration hall [Central Labor Union headquarters]: 'Send the reserves!' Orderly, but almost as if by magic, the hall is emptied. The pickets are deployed by their leaders to surround the police and sluggers. The police raise their riot guns but the workers ignore and rush through them. 'Chase out the hired sluggers,' is their battle cry. The cowardly sluggers take to their heels and run. The police and strikers use their clubs freely. Many casualties on both sides. The workers have captured the market!"

Two of the "special deputies" who had volunteered to club strikers to death were killed themselves in the wild melee. One was Arthur Lyman, Citizens Alliance attorney and vice-president of the American Ball Company. The market was strewn with deputies' clubs and badges. The police disappeared.

The employers then agreed to move no trucks. On May 25 the

strike was settled, with union recognition, no discrimination in rehiring of strikers and arbitration of wages, which the employers had increased previously to forestall a strike and avoid dealing with the union.

An interesting sidelight of the second strike was a leaflet issued by the Communist Party denouncing the Dunne brothers and Skoglund as "traitors" and "agents of the bosses" and calling for "rank and file leaders," although the strike committee was composed entirely of 75 workers on the trucks.

A significant observation was made by Walker in *American City*: "Throughout, the nub and core of dispute was a matter of fundamental principle and strategy—for both sides—known as 'recognition of the inside workers.' ... To the employers, the 'banana men, the chicken pickers, and the pork picklers' who worked inside their warehouses were outside the jurisdiction of a truck union. But why did they care so much? They cared because their inclusion meant that a kind of industrial union would be set up in the trucking industry of Minneapolis. Without the inside workers, they would be dealing with a pure and simple craft union of truck drivers, weaker in bargaining power, easier to maneuver and smash. To the union, the issue of the 'inside workers' meant the same thing, a step toward industrial organization, a strong union..."

Not only the Minneapolis employers were disturbed by the industrial union implications of Local 574's campaign. AFL Teamsters President Daniel Tobin was no less upset by the Minneapolis truck drivers' victories. For he, too, was a bitter opponent of industrial unionism. He was to play a key part in the AFL in blocking an industrial union policy. Meanwhile, he openly joined with the Minneapolis employers in the next stage of the struggle.

The leaders of 574 put no trust in the employers to live up to the agreement in the second strike. They promptly began preparing the union for another battle in the event the bosses reneged. They gave the employers a month or so to comply with the pact. When the employers stalled, chiseled and ignored the union, the firm answer was a strike, called July 16, 1934.

One of the reasons the employers were emboldened to force the union's hand was a declaration by Tobin in the Teamsters magazine denouncing the Local 574 leaders as "radicals and Communists." This red baiting had no effect on the Minneapolis workers. On July 6 a parade of some 10,000 AFL members had proclaimed in advance their support of the coming strike. The meeting of business agents of the Building Trades Council denounced Tobin's red baiting and affirmed their support of 574. Only the bosses and their newspapers

took the cue from Tobin and began screaming "Reds" and "Bloody Revolution."

The blood, however, was drawn by the other side. Police and employers deliberately planned to lure isolated picket trucks into an ambush and shoot down the unarmed workers without warning. This was to be a pretext for sending in the National Guard to break the strike.

The trap was sprung on the fifth day of the strike—"Bloody Friday," July 20. *American City* quotes a strike picket on what happened that day in the wholesale grocery district:

"For two hours we stood around wondering what was up for there was no truck in sight. Then at two P.M. drew near a tensing of bodies and nervous shifting of feet and heads among the police indicated that something was up. We were right, for a few minutes later about one hundred more cops hove into view escorting a large yellow truck. The truck, without license plates and with the cab heavily wired, pulled up to the loading platform of the Slocum-Bergren Company. Here a few boxes were loaded on... At five past two the truck slowly pulled out... It turned down Sixth Avenue and then turned on Third Street toward Seventh Avenue. As it did a picket truck containing about ten pickets followed. As the picket truck drew near the convoy, the police without warning let loose a barrage of fire. Pickets fell from the trucks, others rushed up to pick up their wounded comrades; as they bent to pick up the injured, the police fired at them... One young worker received a full charge of buckshot in the back as he bent to pick up a wounded picket.

"The rain of bullets then became a little heavier so I and three other pickets hopped a fence and walked to headquarters... Pickets by the dozens lying all over the floor with blood flowing from their wounds, more coming in and no place to put them. The doctor would treat one after another who urged him to treat others first.

"The Minneapolis papers printed hundreds of lies about what had happened but none was brazen enough to claim that the strikers had any weapons at all."

This was substantially confirmed by the Governor's own investigating committee which, after the strike, found that the police had planned the attack in advance and fired to kill on unarmed pickets.

One worker, Harry Ness, died shortly after the shooting. Another, John Belor, died a few days later in the hospital. Some 55 workers were wounded. Within 20 minutes of the massacre, the National Guard rolled into the area. It was their signal.

But if this terrorism was expected to smash the strike, the bosses got an unpleasant surprise.

All union-driven taxicabs, ice, beer and gasoline trucks, which had continued to operate by union permit, immediately went on strike. The police were cleared from all areas near the strike headquarters. Then, when Harry Ness was buried, the whole working class of Minneapolis turned out in an historic demonstration for his funeral. Some 40,000 marched in the funeral cortege. They took over the streets. Not a cop was in sight. The workers themselves directed traffic.

Governor Olsen declared martial law. The military commanders began handing out "permits" for trucks to operate under the protection of the troops. Soon thousands of trucks were being manned by scabs and strikebreakers. The union did not take it lying down. The leaders gave an ultimatum to Olsen to withdraw the permits and to issue others only with the union's approval.

Then followed a war of attrition for several weeks. The strikers defied the troops and renewed their mobile picketing, keeping the military officials and cops on a merry-go-round. The guardsmen launched an attack in force on the Local 574 strike headquarters, arresting 100 members, including Bill Brown and the Dume brothers, and throwing them into specially constructed military stockades. But the union rank and file, trained in democratic self-reliance, held firm and ran the strike as usual. So great was the outcry and protest—including another mass demonstration of 40,000—that the union members and leaders were released in a few days.

Two of the tribe of Roosevelt's labor board mediators—"mediators" as the workers called them—were shipped into Minneapolis early in the strike. They were Father Haas, a Catholic priest, and E. H. Dunnigan. They had at once proposed a settlement based on some concessions to the workers which the bosses had flatly rejected. In the end, with the troops out in force—almost one soldier for every striker—Father Haas and Dunnigan tried to put over a watered-down version of their original proposals. When they went to sell the proposition to the rank-and-file Strike Committee of 100, they were subjected to such a devastating cross-examination that they were utterly routed. A new mediator was sent in and Father Haas had to retire to a sanitarium.

On August 22, after five weeks of the toughest battling against all the forces of the employers and government, the strikers won. The bosses capitulated and signed an agreement granting the union its main demands. This included the right to represent "inside workers," which the employers had threatened to fight to the bitter end as industrial unionism.

While the Minneapolis truck drivers were battling their way to

victory, the San Francisco general strike—involving 125,000 workers at its peak—carried the American class struggle to new heights.

On May 9, 1934, from 10,000 to 15,000 West Coast members of the AFL International Longshoremen's Association went on an "unauthorized" strike. Soon the strike included 25,000 workers, many of them members of seamen's organizations who joined in sympathy.

The original demands had been for a coast-wide agreement, union control of hiring halls and a closed shop. The strikers added demands for \$1 an hour instead of 85 cents and the 30-hour week instead of 48.

From the start, the strike was waged with great militancy. Frederick J. Lang, in his book *Maritime, A History and Program*, wrote: "It was a real rank-and-file strike, with the 'leaders' swept along in the flood. It encountered every weapon then in the arsenal of the employers. The shipowners hired their own thugs who tried to work the docks and man the ships. The city police of every port on the Coast were mobilized on the waterfronts to hunt down the strikers. The newspapers, launching a slander campaign against the strikers, called on the citizenry to form vigilante committees to raid strike headquarters, the actual organization of this dirty work being entrusted to the American Legion and other 'patriotic' societies."

ILA President Joseph Ryan hastily flew into San Francisco from New York in an effort to squelch the strike. Over the heads of the strikers and their local leaders, he signed an agreement giving up the main demand—the union-controlled hiring hall. He was repudiated by the strikers in a coast-wide poll.

The chief strike leader was the then unknown Harry Bridges. He was under Stalinist influence but fortunately, at that time, did not adhere so closely to Communist Party policies as to carry out its line of not working inside the "social fascist" AFL unions. Under the radicalizing effect of the depression, maritime workers were influenced by various political tendencies—Stalinist, IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) and others—with the Stalinists playing the dominant role.

Ryan—a consort of shipowners, stevedore bosses, gangsters and Tammany politicians, who 20 years later was to be dumped by these elements when he was no longer useful to them—tried to split the strike by making separate settlements in each port. He succeeded only in Tacoma. AFL President William Green joined in denouncing the strike and yelling "reds" and "communists."

On July 5 the bosses tried to smash the strike by attacking its strategic center, San Francisco's waterfront, with calculated force and violence. At the "Battle of Rincon Hill" the police blasted away

with tear gas, pistols and shotguns at the waterfront pickets. They killed Howard Sperry and Nick Bordoise and wounded 109 others. As in the third Minneapolis strike and the Toledo Auto-Lite battle, the deliberate massacres perpetrated by the police were the signal for sending in the National Guard.

The murder and wounding of strikers did not crush the workers. Instead, San Francisco labor answered with a tremendous counter-attack—a general strike. For two days, the working class paralyzed the city. The workers took over many city functions, directing traffic and assuming other municipal tasks. On the third and fourth days, the general strike petered out when the AFL leaders, who were swept along in the first spontaneous protest against the killings, ordered an end to the stoppage.

The bosses and police, with the aid of organized vigilantes, vented their fear and hatred of the workers on the small radical organizations, not daring to hit directly at the unions. Thirty-five gangs of vigilantes, heavily armed, raided headquarters of Communist, IWW and Socialist groups. They smashed furniture, hurled typewriters and literature out the windows, beat up many defenseless workers. In some instances, the police who arrived after the vigilantes left completed the work of destruction. They jailed more than 300 persons.

After 11 weeks, the longshore strike was ended on July 31 with an agreement to arbitrate. It was a poor settlement, but the workers returned to the job in an organized body. Within a year, in job action after job action, they won the union hiring hall up and down the Coast. Their struggle gave impetus to maritime organization on the East Coast, leading in 1937 to establishment of the CIO National Maritime Union, and opened the way for organization of West Coast industrial labor.

Too little credit has been given to the Toledo, Minneapolis and San Francisco strikes for their effect on the subsequent industrial union movement, the CIO. But had these magnificent examples of labor struggle not occurred, in all likelihood the CIO would have been delayed or taken a different and less militant course.

It was these gigantic battles—all led by radicals—that convinced John L. Lewis that the American workers were determined to be organized and would follow the leadership that showed it meant business.

"Lewis watched the unrest and flareups of violence through the summer of 1934. He saw the Dunne brothers of Minneapolis lead a general strike of truck drivers into a virtual civil war. Blood ran in Minneapolis," wrote Alinsky in his *John L. Lewis—An Unauthorized Biography*.

"In San Francisco a general strike spearheaded by Harry Bridges' Longshoremen's Union paralyzed the great western city for four days.

"Before that year was out, seven hundred thousand workers had struck. Lewis could read the revolutionary handwriting on the walls of American industry. He knew that the workers were seething and aching to be organized so they could strike back. Everyone wanted to hit out, employer against worker and worker against employer and anyone else who they felt was not in their class. America was becoming more class conscious than at any time in its history..."

Of course, "civil war" was going on in towns and cities from coast to coast and blood was being spilled in scores of other places besides Minneapolis, Toledo and San Francisco. These latter cities were unique, however, in this: *they showed how the workers could fight and win. They gave heart and hope to labor everywhere for the climactic struggle that was to build the CIO.*