

The 1934 Toledo Auto-Lite Strike
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No event in history occurs in a vacuum. Things do not just happen. The 1934 Auto-Lite strike in Toledo, Ohio took place in an atmosphere of anger, despair, exploitation and frustration. The city had been hard hit by the Depression. Toledo's large industrial work base and in particular its close ties with the automobile industry resulted in a huge percentage of its workers losing their jobs in the early 1930s. By May of 1934, the *Toledo Blade* reported the jobless numbers as 7,907,000 nationally. In the Toledo area, 80% of workers were unemployed. Industrial workers were impacted the most.¹

One effect of the huge unemployment rate was the mistreatment of those people who were fortunate enough to be employed at that time. Unscrupulous managers and supervisors intimidated workers. One common tactic came in threatening the men and women that they could be easily replaced. This was especially true of those unskilled production workers who made up most of the labor force at factories such as the Auto-Lite plant, located on Champlain Street about a mile from downtown Toledo. The factory produced a variety of electrical parts, such as starters, ignition coils and generators for several automobile manufacturers. A warning from supervisors that there were hundreds of people standing outside the gates of the factory just waiting to take their jobs was a definite threat, and it was used often. Not only were there plenty of people waiting for the jobs, but they were more than willing to take the jobs for less pay.

John Szymanski, a machinist at the Auto-Lite, recalled the sinister atmosphere in the plant. Some workers would bring in items such as butter, eggs and chickens for their supervisors. In

return, these workers would be placed in better jobs or in some other way be taken care of. This created a climate in which many workers found it necessary to do extra things to please their foremen and so protect their jobs.² Another worker named Mary Aberling remembered how the production workers were expected to forego vacations or never take off due to illness. All workers were expected to be on the job every day.

At the Auto-Lite plant, prior to the strike, foremen held the power to hire, fire and select workers for particular jobs within their respective departments. This power was completely discretionary. A notable symbol of this power was the “bench.” Each day several employees would be set aside to be called if they were needed. The supervisors would arbitrarily select someone from the bench to do a specific job. When the job was complete, the workers would return to the bench and once more wait to be chosen. The workers received no pay while they were on the bench. It was not unusual for some workers to remain unselected on the bench for days on end.³

All American industry was under pressure to become more productive in order to compete in a Depression era economy, and several methods or systems were implemented to increase production. The Auto-Lite plant adopted two in particular. The Fredrick Winslow Taylor method increased productivity without investing in new or better equipment. Using this method, assembly line speeds were increased in small increments as the workers became more proficient. An interesting note here was that Taylor originally predicted that his method would benefit both workers and the company by increasing the workers’ pay as productivity was increased. The ultimate reality proved to be a benefit only to the owners and managers as the workers received no increase in pay.⁴

The Auto-Lite also implemented the Bedeaux System at its Toledo plant. The Bedeaux System involved a bonus for employees who produced above their established quota. The system became flawed at the Auto-Lite as the quotas were increased each time they were exceeded. In addition, the workers were given only a portion of the bonus; the rest of the bonus was distributed to supervisors and foremen. The bonuses to some supervisors amounted to more than the annual wage of the production workers whom they supervised. This seemed to be grossly unfair to them. The bonus system evolved into an incentive for the supervisors to push their production workers even harder, leading to a vicious cycle of increased quotas and increased pressure to do whatever was necessary to get a bonus.⁵

The commonly held viewpoint of the production workers at the Auto-Lite by 1934 was that the management held nearly absolute power over their economic fate. The workers at the plant felt that the only way to gain any control over their lives and their future was to organize a union that would be recognized by the Auto-Lite company as a legitimate bargaining agent to negotiate reasonable working conditions. In a very short time, this desire to start a union would turn into a test of strength, unity and will between not only the Auto-Lite management and its workers, but American business and its unskilled workforce in general.

In the early spring of 1934, Toledo was on the verge of being the center of a general strike by several labor organizations. The labor trouble at Auto-Lite was just one part of an extended effort by workers to negotiate better deals with management throughout the area. Some of the other labor disputes involved electrical workers at Toledo Edison, production workers at Bingham Stamping and Logan Gear, local tug boat operators, the Toledo Moving Pictures Operators Union, and drivers and inside workers of the local meatpacking industry.

By May of 1934, the labor situation in Toledo was so volatile that a federal mediator, E. H. Dunnigan, was brought in to work out a settlement between the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Union and the Toledo Edison Company. The general opinion among local business and government leaders was that if the electrical workers walked out, the other unions would follow and create a general work stoppage throughout the city.⁶ In addition to talks with Toledo Edison, Dunnigan appealed to Clem Miniger, President of the Auto-Lite Company, and Arthur Minch, Vice-President of Auto-Lite, to begin negotiations with their workers.

But, Auto-Lite managers refused. Instead, they prepared for a strike. Before pickets could be set up around the plant, stockpiles of food, ammunition and tear gas were brought into the plant. Drivers were recruited and armed to be used to pick up employees who would be willing to cross the picket lines. Strikebreakers were recruited from the South and were brought north to replace striking workers. Later this would prove to be ineffective since the untrained strikebreakers could not operate the machinery properly, and this caused significant damage to the equipment and reduced production even well after the strike had ended.⁷

Once the strike was underway, Auto-Lite's upper management attempted to present themselves to the public as the protectors of the interests of the company in general and the loyal non-striking employees in particular. Management described union organizers and demonstrators as uncouth, destructive agitators. According to the management, the organizers were destroyers of a harmonious enterprise and disloyal to the Auto-Lite family. This belief in loyalty was shared by many of the workers who crossed the picket lines. Arthur Minch, Vice-President of Auto-Lite, publicly referred to the union organizers as communists.⁸

Quite early on in the strike, Minch requested the Ohio National Guard to be brought in to the plant area to protect the property. Before the National Guard could arrive, local law

enforcement was called in to maintain order. At that time, the Lucas County Sheriff's Department was headed by Sheriff Dave Krieger. The sheriff maintained a presence at the Auto-Lite plant using his regular deputies as well as several special deputies made up of Auto-Lite employees.

Not all of the Auto-Lite supervisors held a negative view of the strikers. Jack Lathrop was a foreman who crossed the picket line throughout the course of the strike. According to Lathrop, the picketers treated him quite well. He was allowed to pass through the picket line safely.⁹ This type of treatment of first line supervisors was not uncommon, especially if they were well liked, or if they were perceived to be fair in their treatment of workers prior to the strike. This treatment was in sharp contrast to that given to the strikebreakers who were brought in or workers who crossed the picket line. One particular incident, which involved the treatment of a strikebreaker attempting to get his paycheck, was photographed and appeared in the *Toledo Blade*. The strikebreaker was grabbed by a group of demonstrators. Some accounts claim that his original assailants were women who stripped him down to only his shoes and a necktie. He was then paraded through the streets until he was rescued by the police.¹⁰

From the beginning of the strike at the Auto-Lite plant, the solidarity of the strikers held strong. During the first five weeks of the strike, pickets were maintained around the plant and their numbers steadily increased. However, the Auto-Lite company retained its ability to run production due to the number of regular employees who crossed the picket line as well as about 1,800 strikebreakers brought in from outside. The use of strikebreakers by the company had the effect of further increasing the anger of not only the strikers, but other local unemployed workers and union sympathizers.

As the number of picketers increased around the plant, the Auto-Lite pressured the local court to issue an injunction to limit the number of pickets. The company was successful, and an injunction was issued by Judge Roy Stuart on May 3 that limited the number of picketers to twenty five people. They would only be allowed to picket in designated areas. The court injunction reduced the effectiveness of the picket line in keeping out strikebreakers, as well as not stopping outgoing parts shipments to the auto assembly plants in Detroit. In reaction to the injunction, Sam Pollock, the Secretary of the Lucas County Unemployed League, responded to Judge Stuart with a letter protesting his injunction. In the letter, Pollock stated that the Unemployed League would deliberately violate the injunction, and picket in sympathy and support of the strikers at the Auto-Lite plant. Soon the number of picketers increased on the Auto-Lite property, while about one hundred supporters from other organizations demonstrated across the street from the plant.¹¹

On May 15, a total of 107 demonstrators were arrested by the sheriff's department. No charges were filed against the people who were arrested and they were soon released. The next day, May 16, saw 46 more people arrested at the Auto-Lite plant. After the arrests, a large group of demonstrators showed up at the jail in support of the picketers. In addition, the regular inmates of the jail noisily joined in sympathy with the demonstration. The event was described in the *Toledo Blade* as a "vociferous demonstration."¹² Once again, no charges were filed against the picketers, and they were all released.

The mass arrests of the picketers by the sheriff's department effectively increased the will of the strikers. The reluctance on the part of the court to file criminal charges against those arrested, and the inability of the sheriff's department to intimidate the strikers, made the strikers and their supporters bolder. In response, the Auto-Lite Company put pressure on Sheriff

Krieger. This time the sheriff was directed to protect the strikebreakers from harassment as they crossed the picket lines. The sheriff's deputies arrested a large number of picketers at the entrances to the plant. Several of those arrested were singled out and charged with violating the court injunction that limited the number of pickets at the plant. Included in those several charged were Louis Budenz, Ted Selander, Sam Pollack and Charles Bigby, all major figures involved in the organization of the strike. But as the men were about to be sentenced in the courtroom of Judge Stuart, a large group of strikers stood up and announced that they were also guilty of the same offense as those charged. Since Judge Stuart was either unable or unwilling to deal with what might turn into another mass arrest, he released the men he was about to sentence.¹³ This incident turned into another demonstration of the solidarity of the strikers. It is important to note that once again the other judges on the court managed to avoid dealing with the Auto-Lite issues and so left Judge Stuart standing alone.¹⁴

By this time, the Auto-Lite strike had become more than just a minor struggle for domination between the two parties directly involved. It was now about the auto parts industry's ability to control its workforce as well as the labor movement's effort to organize within the industry. The striking workers were feeling a new found strength and unity, but the Auto-Lite Company was not inclined to surrender any of its control. From this point on, each side would escalate its use of force in an attempt to overcome the other. By now, the strike at the Auto-Lite plant had also become a focal point for all of the other striking workers in the Toledo area.

The Auto-Lite managers and owners had considerable resources backing them. These included huge financial assets, local government support, support of local law enforcement and private detective agencies. In particular, the Auto-Lite had the backing of the Lucas County Sheriff. The sheriff's department was controlled by the Republican Party, and the Auto-Lite was

a large contributor to the Republican Party.¹⁵ In contrast, the strikers at the Auto-Lite plant had the support of the public and other labor organizations. The number of picketers and supporters at the plant continued to increase, and it became more difficult for strikebreakers to get through to work in the plant. The confrontations between the picketers and the strikebreakers became more violent. Rocks were thrown at cars carrying people who crossed the picket lines. Windows in the factory buildings were broken. People inside the factory retaliated by throwing objects at the picketers. Tear gas was thrown from the factory into the crowds outside, and gunfire came from both sides.

On May 21, Faye Duvall was injured by a brick thrown through the windshield of the car she was riding through the picket line into the plant. Robert Kunstbeck was arrested for an assault on picketer Iva Green. The next day the *Toledo Blade* reported another eleven people had been injured at the Auto-Lite site; five of those injured were police officers.¹⁶ Arrests and criminal charges were not limited to the striking workers side. Auto-Lite's President Miniger and Vice-President Arthur Minch were charged with permitting the discharge of tear gas and the firing of six bullets from the factory building on May 23.¹⁷

The physical confrontations continued into late May. The Auto-Lite Company managers became more intent on getting their strikebreakers into the factory. The picket lines expanded in number and covered every gate into the factory. More supporters and demonstrators came to the site. The area surrounding the plant filled with approximately 10,000 people. The attempt to get the strikebreakers through the crowd by this time was helped by Toledo police and Lucas County sheriff's deputies on the outside and company agents from inside the building. Tear gas was fired from the plant. Picketers were injured by steel generator brackets thrown from inside the plant. They threw tear gas canisters back into the plant and broke more windows. Strikers also

went into the plant and turned over cars in the parking lot. By the afternoon of May 23, an estimated crowd of more than 10,000 people surrounded the plant and refused to allow anyone in or out. The Auto-Lite factory and the 1,500 people inside were effectively under siege conditions.

Outside the Auto-Lite plant, the situation on May 23 escalated into a full-scale riot by the early evening hours. Several newspaper reporters were among the people trapped inside the plant. Robert Daley of the *Toledo Blade* managed to get his account of the day's events out to the newspaper via the telephone. According to Daley, the rioting began in front of the main gate to the plant. Tear gas was thrown from inside the plant toward the crowds near the entrance. Many office workers went to look out from the windows to see the action below. Some of the tear gas was hurled back toward the plant as well as rocks and bricks that smashed through windows. By this time, it had become evident that those people still inside the plant would not be able to get out without assistance.¹⁸

Throughout the afternoon, sporadic confrontations broke out between strikers outside the plant and security forces within it. For the most part, any lull in the fighting was due to the exhaustion of the demonstrators surrounding the plant. The stoppages were short lived. In one instance, a group of about 25 strikers attempted to storm onto the plant property. Sheriff's deputies armed with clubs stepped in to drive the intruders back. More deputies were stationed in the area and armed with sawed-off shotguns. They were instructed to shoot at the legs of any future attackers. At times, there were attempts to control the mob from the outside. During one successful attempt to establish calm, the protestors allowed Rose Martin, an office worker who worked throughout the strike, to be evacuated from inside the plant to get medical attention after she had been overcome by gas that had drifted back into the building.

As daylight gave way to darkness, the situation in and around the plant became even more dangerous. Crowds were beginning to form on every street corner within several blocks of the Auto-Lite plant. It was clear to the strikers that the supply of tear gas was getting low inside the plant, and this made the attackers outside much bolder. Entrances to the plant were stormed again, and the amount of bricks and other projectiles thrown at the plant increased. The crowd became larger and pressed closer to the plant. At one point in the evening, police were able to get into the plant with a fresh supply of tear gas. This enabled the security forces inside the Auto-Lite to hold off subsequent attacks after nightfall.

Many workers inside the buildings became sick from the tear gas thrown at the crowds outside since the gas would often drift back when the wind changed direction. In some parts of the plant, workers held wet handkerchiefs over their faces and ran through clouds of smoke to get away from the gas. Sometimes they had to hang out of windows to avoid the gas and get breathable air, thus dangerously exposing themselves to attacks from the strikers. Police and ambulances had to force their way through the crowds to retrieve the injured on both sides. Firemen also worked under dangerous conditions. Tear gas bombs thrown from inside the plant exploded near where they were trying to extinguish burning vehicles, and people in the crowds outside threw objects at the firemen at times.

By early evening, it became evident that local law enforcement could no longer control the situation around the Auto-Lite plant. Sheriff Krieger now called in the Ohio National Guard. Several days earlier, Arthur Minch had requested that the National Guard come to the plant to secure the area and allow the plant to maintain production.¹⁹ Colonel E.W. Fuhr of Columbus and General Ludwig Conelly, Commander of the 145th and 148th Infantry of the Ohio National Guard had come to Toledo to survey the situation earlier in the week. General Conelly stated

that National Guard troops would not be placed at the Auto-Lite site unless the situation became so serious that the local police department could not deal with it. In addition, he said that local law enforcement agencies or government officials would have to request National Guard intervention. Both National Guard officers made note of the fact that up to the time of their assessment of the situation, no formal criminal charges had been filed against the strikers, and the local police and sheriff appeared to have control of the situation.

By the night of May 23, Sheriff Krieger concluded that he no longer had the ability to control the strike at the Auto-Lite plant. Seven hundred and forty four officers and men from the Ohio National Guard were immediately ordered to Toledo. The troops arrived at the Auto-Lite plant just before dawn on Thursday May 24. The strikers and their supporters were tired from the several hours of rioting, and their spirits were dampened by a cold rain that had begun to fall. The National Guard troops managed to get the workers and staff out of the plant with very little resistance from the relatively small number of demonstrators still remaining outside the plant. As the besieged workers were being escorted from the plant by the Guard troops, Auto-Lite officials reminded the workers that they were to return to work at 7 A.M. the next morning.

May 24 was to become the bloodiest day of the strike. Soon after the troops managed to free the workers from the plant, the number of strikers and their supporters increased and gathered around the plant again. By noon, the crowd outside the plant had increased from a few hundred to over a thousand and was growing steadily. The Guardsmen did not attempt to disperse the people until the crowd began to throw bricks and other objects, hitting the troops. The National Guard then advanced on the rioters with fixed bayonets, but the rioters continued to throw stones and bricks and taunt the Guardsmen.

The confrontation between the Guardsmen and the rioters escalated. The National Guard retaliated with tear gas, and the protestors fled. As soon as the gas dissipated, the rioters returned in even greater numbers and increased their barrage of bricks, stones and bottles. During this exchange, several people at the scene were injured as they were struck by tear gas canisters fired by the troops. As this confrontation continued, the Guardsmen ran out of tear gas, and the rioters pushed them from the position that they had previously secured. In a desperate response to the advancing rioters, the National Guard fired their weapons into the air. This action managed to disperse the crowd for a short time. An additional fifty Guardsmen were sent in as reinforcements. The attacks on the Guardsmen continued. The Guardsmen responded with more tear gas, but many of the gas canisters were thrown right back at them.

At about 3 P.M., the National Guard fired their weapons a second time, this time they fired into the crowd. Frank Hubay, Stephen Cyigon, C.E. Meek, Willie Abel, Edward Flynn and Joe Weislek were shot. Frank Hubay and Stephen Cyigon died as a result of their wounds. Mr. Hubay was a 37 year old resident of East Toledo. Mr. Cyigon resided in Rossford. His sister, Helen, was an Auto-Lite employee, and she was one of the workers who had been stranded inside the plant.

Once again there was a lull in the fighting, but once again it was short lived. The *Toledo Blade* described the next confrontation between the rioters and the National Guard as hand to hand fighting. The rioters were repulsed, and the Guardsmen were able to hold their position. By 4:30 in the afternoon, an estimated 10,000 people were crowded into the immediate vicinity around the Auto-Lite factory. Many of those in the crowd were spectators drawn to the scene out of curiosity.

Throughout the strike, statements were made that most of the problems were created by people who were not directly involved in the labor dispute. These assertions were made by some local news media as well as the management from the Auto-Lite. On May 23, a local Toledo newspaper, the *News Bee*, ran a front page editorial that said the violence during the Auto-Lite strike was not perpetrated so much by Toledo workers, but rather by “lawless, itinerant agitators.” According to the *News Bee*, these people did not have an interest in any sort of settlement, but instead, they were intent only on creating havoc in the community. There was no evidence found of outside agitators involved in the strike. One of the incidents that the Auto-Lite Company associated with “outsiders” involved the arrest of two people who were distributing communist hand-bills at the picket site. However, both of those arrested – Dorothy Stickney and Edwin Blakely - were Toledo residents.²⁰

Local communist and socialist organizations were blamed for meddling in the labor dispute and further inciting the rioters. Early on in the strike, local communist organizations attempted to recruit the strikers and offered support. The communists tried to get the strikers to support the communist agenda, and in particular, get them to provide monetary support for loyalists in Spain. Once the strikers figured out that they were being used by the communists, rather than being supported by them, the strikers split away from the communists.²¹

However, there was outside support for the Auto-Lite strike from labor unions, especially some of the newly formed labor organizations in the automobile industry. Most of it was in the form of moral support from people in the same situation – looking to become a recognized bargaining agent to negotiate with their employers. Still there was little direct involvement by any labor groups outside the local area helping the Auto-Lite strikers.

On the day following its front page editorial, the *News Bee*, reported the names and addresses of those injured in the clashes between the National Guard and the strikers. According to the paper, all of the strikers, supporters and bystanders injured that day were local people. The only non-local people listed were National Guard members. Throughout the strike, the *Toledo Blade* reported the names and addresses of those who were arrested. Nearly all of those arrested were local people. One notable exception was Heywood Broun, a famous New York columnist, who was arrested and detained for a short time by the National Guard. These and other records tended to refute the claims of the Auto-Lite management that outside agitators were responsible for the strike and the violence that came to be associated with it. In fact, once the National Guard came in to relieve the local authorities, Toledo police officers were assigned to observe incoming buses and trains on a tip from unnamed sources that 200 communist agitators were expected to arrive in Toledo from Detroit and Chicago. But there were no reports of anyone found by the police that were outside agitators.

It is interesting to note that there was quite a bit of contrast between coverage of the strike in Toledo's two major newspapers. Overall, the *Toledo Blade* tended to favor the strikers, while the *News Bee* was more negative. One particular incident covered by both newspapers describes the contrast. On May 23, an incident occurred between a strikebreaker crossing the picket line and a striking worker. The report in the *Toledo Blade* stated that Robert Kunstbeck assaulted picketer Iva Green as he attempted to break through the picket line to go to work. The *News Bee* reported that Mr. Kunstbeck "fell against" Miss Duvall when he was pushed by another striker. The *News Bee* also gave much more positive coverage to the Lucas County Sheriff and the Auto-Lite managers. In another front page editorial on May 25, the *News Bee* came out pro Auto-Lite. The *News Bee* also ran a story that quoted Detroit auto industry magnates as fearful that the riots

in Toledo would set off labor unrest throughout their industry. This type of labor unrest would negatively impact the economic gains of the auto industry in general. The *News Bee* also asserted that the Auto-Lite strike and the possibility of a general labor strike were politically motivated, and compared the strikers to the radicals fighting in Spain.²²

The violence in Toledo soon got the attention of the Roosevelt administration in Washington D. C. The Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins, took action to secure a settlement in the Auto-Lite dispute in particular, as well as attempt to avert the threat of a general strike in Toledo and the nation. She sent Charles P. Taft, the son of former President William Howard Taft, to Toledo. Taft was given complete authority over the mediation involved in the local labor disputes. J. Arthur Minch told the *Toledo Blade* that he could not commit the Auto-Lite Company to any negotiations at that time, but by May 28, Taft announced that a settlement was at hand between the strikers and the Auto-Lite company. Daniel Kelly had been the negotiator for Auto-Lite. Minch was not a part of the negotiations.

The Auto-Lite strike began on Friday, April 13, 1934. Fifty four days later, on June 5, 1934, the factory was reopened for normal business. The strike was costly for everyone involved. The company lost production, and the physical damage to the plant would be even more costly for the company. The Auto-Lite managers had also lost money as they prepared for the strike by hiring internal security forces and making other preparations. Even as it boasted to the union that the company had a million dollar fund dedicated to fight any attempt to unionize, the company would lose an even larger amount in the process.²³ The strikers also suffered. The workers who walked out on strike for fifty-four days lost their wages. Many of the workers were already just getting by in a tough Depression era economy and so lost whatever they had left. For two men, Frank Hubay and Stephen Cyigon, the cost was ultimate; they lost their lives.

Many more people were injured. Property of people who lived in the vicinity of the factory was damaged even though they were not responsible for causing the strike.

The overarching demand from the Auto-Lite workers was to be allowed to organize their own union. The most important part of the settlement contract was that a new union organization, Federal Labor Union Local 18384, was recognized by the company as a legitimate bargaining agent. The workers no longer had to be represented by a company union that was ineffective at best. Now that the workers had a viable bargaining agent in the new auto union, they had laid the foundation for future negotiations.

Another substantial change came to the Auto-Lite plant as a result of the strike. Workers gained a sense of dignity and self-confidence. The workers gained the ability to bring grievances forward without the fear of reprisals from management or the loss of their job. Supervisors no longer held the absolute power to hire and fire their workers. Yet even though the Auto-Lite Company had agreed to accept and negotiate with the new union, the company still tried to eliminate the union.

In 1936, congressional hearings were conducted with regard to “Violations of Free Speech and the Rights of Labor.” During these hearings, the Auto-Lite Company was shown to have prepared for the strike by stockpiling weapons and ammunition in the plant as well as engaging in union busting tactics after the strike. Auto-Lite was found to have hired a company called Corporate Auxiliary, which successfully placed an agent within the local union. Very quickly, this agent managed to become an executive of the local union.²⁴

After the strike, animosity remained among some of the workers who crossed the picket lines. Elizabeth Nyitrai was a production worker who crossed the picket line and worked during the strike. She commented that many of the strikers would not speak to her or others who did the

same thing for several months after the strike. While most eventually got back on good terms with each other, some never forgave the strikebreakers.²⁵ Relations between managers and workers also remained strained for a time after the strike. Claude Pound was a production supervisor during and after the strike. He remembered that during the strike the workers were very hostile toward him, but once everyone was back to work the hostility faded away rather quickly.²⁶ Still anger never subsided toward Arthur Minch, who remained Vice President at the Auto-Lite plant in Toledo. Many workers felt a strong, personal hatred toward him. Until Minch was transferred to Auto-Lite's Port Huron plant, the Minch home was under constant guard.²⁷

The strike brought about solidarity in places other than the plant itself. Lynn Waters, a Toledo policeman during the strike, told of a fellow policeman who was suspended from the department. The suspended officer went to work for the Auto-Lite during the strike. He was about to be reinstated on the police force, but was not when it was discovered that he worked as a strikebreaker.²⁸ The strikers tended to remember who supported them and who did not. During the strike, a small business named *Buddy's Box Lunch* provided the picketers with free coffee and donuts. *Buddy's Box Lunch* was owned by Virgil Gladieux. When Gladieux was asked to bring food into the plant during the strike, he refused. Another food service company known as *Homemade* did take food in for the strikebreakers. After the strike was over, canteens were set up in the Auto-Lite plant. While *Homemade* stocked one canteen, the rest of the canteens throughout the factory were managed by Gladieux. Virgil Gladieux's business prospered everywhere in Toledo from then on.

The original and main intent of the Auto-Lite strikers was to force the company to recognize the workers' right to use collective bargaining to settle disputes. They believed this

right was guaranteed under Section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933. It said workers had the right to form a union and use that union to act as their bargaining agent with the company. But the Auto-Lite Company did not want to be the first auto industry company to set a precedent of allowing their employees to organize under a union. The strikers, with the support of other unions, managed to force the Auto-Lite Company to recognize the new Local 18384. This new union would evolve into the powerful Local 12 of the United Auto Workers.

The Auto-Lite strike demonstrated that a strike could be an effective tool used to organize a union even in a factory that was opposed to union organization. It also showed that unskilled workers could organize in spite of the idea that they could be easily replaced. The success of the Auto-Lite strike encouraged other workers in Toledo to organize. The 1935 strike against the Chevrolet plant in Toledo was the next step to get union recognition for the unskilled workers throughout the automobile manufacturing business.

Endnotes

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- ¹ *Toledo Blade*. 1934. "April Unemployed Number 7,907,000." May 24, p.2.
- ² Philip A. Korth and Margaret Beegle, *I Remember Like Today: The Auto-Lite strike of 1934* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1988), 6.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 48.
- ⁴ Sol Dollinger, Genora Dollinger and Kim Moody, *Not Automatic: Women and the Left in the Forging of the Auto Workers Union* (East Lansing MI: Michigan State University Press, 1988) 4.
- ⁵ Korth and Beegle, *I Remember Like Today: The Auto-Lite Strike of 1934*, 44.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.
- ¹⁰ Tony Howard, *The 1934 Electric Auto-Lite Strike* (Bowling Green Ohio: WBGU-TV VHS, 1995)
- ¹¹ Dollinger, *Not Automatic: Women and the Left in the Forging of the Auto Workers Union*, 134.
- ¹² *Toledo Blade*, 1934. May 16
- ¹³ *Toledo Blade*, 1934. May 18
- ¹⁴ Edward Lamb, *No Lamb for Slaughter* (New York: Harcourt, 1963), 40.
- ¹⁵ Korth and Beegle, *I Remember Like Today: The Auto-Lite Strike of 1934*, 64.
- ¹⁶ *Toledo Blade*. 1934. "Victims Carry Fumes to Hospital." May 22. p.14.
- ¹⁷ *Toledo Blade*. 1934. "Minch Arrested Then Released." May 24. p.2.
- ¹⁸ *Toledo Blade*. 1934. "Many Made Ill, Scores Hurt in Strike Rioting." May 24. p.4.
- ¹⁹ Korth and Beegle, *I Remember Like Today: The Auto-Lite Strike of 1934*, 88.
- ²⁰ *Toledo Blade*. 1934. "Guards Detain Heywood Broun." May 21. p.17.
- ²¹ Korth and Beegle, *I remember Like Today: The Auto-Lite Strike of 1934*, 154.
- ²² *Toledo News Bee*. 1934. "Editorial." May 23. p.1.
- ²³ Dollinger, and Moody, *Not Automatic: Women and the Left in the Forging of the Auto Workers Union*, 143.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.
- ²⁵ Korth and Beegle, *I Remember Like Today: The Auto-Lite Strike of 1934*, 190.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 190.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 199.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

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