

1.00

Also Available from: WORKERS PRESS

Veteran Communist Series

- On the Struggle Against Revisionism
by Admiral Kilpatrick..... \$1.00
- A Veteran Communist Speaks
by Joe Dougher..... \$1.00

International Communist Movement Series

- The Struggle in Chile.....\$.60
- Cheddie Jagan on the
Revolutionary Movement in Guyana.....\$.60

Other Titles

- The Negro National Colonial Question
by Nelson Peery \$2.95
- Fight for Jobs
Communist Labor Party \$.10
- First Congress Documents
Communist Labor Party \$.75

WORKERS PRESS
P. O. Box 3774
Chicago, Illinois

A VETERAN COMMUNIST SPEAKS

Akron Rubber Workers' Strikes of 1936

by JIM KELLER



WORKERS PRESS

JIM KELLER:

A VETERAN COMMUNIST SPEAKS

A VETERAN COMMUNIST SPEAKS

by **JIM KELLER**

with a preface by the Political Bureau of the
Communist Labor Party of the
United States of North America

Workers Press
1975

PREFACE

Comrades Jim and Evelyn Keller need no introduction to the older generation of Communists. Since the early 1920's Comrades Jim and Evelyn have remained in the thick of the struggle. In the fight to unite the old Communist Party, they worked with Ruthenberg against the treacherous Lovestone gang — especially in the struggle around accepting the position of the Comintern on the Negro question.

After the defeat of the Lovestone group, Comrades Jim and Evelyn went to the West Coast organization of the CPUSA. Their organizing work in Los Angeles was interrupted when both of them were jailed. Jim was one of the leaders of the agricultural workers and after his arrest and release he went to the Imperial Valley where he participated in and helped to lead the struggle of the lettuce and melon farm workers. In the course of the struggle for unionization, two important strikes were held. The first strike in May, 1930, was squashed almost immediately. The second strike of melon workers, a few weeks later, resulted in the arrest of 122 workers including comrade Jim. These workers were convicted and sentenced to 5 years in prison. Amongst the many Filipino and Anglo-American workers were Mexican workers, deportations were also used as punishment for participation in the strike. Jim and one of his co-workers were sent to Folsom prison, the rest of the strikers were sent to San Quentin.

In 1932 Jim was paroled after spending two years and eight months in prison.

From 1935-39, he led the Goodyear strike in Akron, which this pamphlet vividly describes; afterwards he left for New York and spent the war years organizing for the CP in the United Electrical Workers' union. 1945 saw Jim go to Chicago where he was the party organizer in the packing industry and participated in a successful strike in 1946 which united Negro and Anglo-American workers.

Although an active participant in the CP, he was constantly shunned by the party's leadership for his criticisms of the leadership were a constant source of trouble for them. On a number of occasions they refused to publish articles and criticisms which Jim submitted.

The 1950's brought with it the McCarthy era where the communists were rounded-up, harassed and jailed. In 1956 Jim was given permanent parole for his "subversive" activities. By this time the Party's leadership had made rapid turns for the worse, and the revisionism of the leadership began to permeate every program. Jim decided however to remain in the party and struggle against this revisionism. He zeroed in on two main points: the national question and the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the newly formed People's Republic of China. He remained in the party fighting tooth and nail for the next five years when in 1963, he resigned. After his resignation, a trial was held and Gus Hall came to Chicago as the main prosecutor. Jim however refused to attend his trial; he felt, as did so many others, that there was no way to turn the CPUSA around.

From that point on Comrades Jim and Evelyn continued their struggle for Marxism-Leninism. Their contributions to the revolutionary movement have only been touched upon in this brief manner. Their dedication and steadfast adherence to Marxism-Leninism is exemplified in this pamphlet.

It is with a great sense of pride that we present this summation of the struggles that Comrade Jim Keller participated in and led. There is much to be learned from this veteran comrade who has dedicated his life to the proletariat and the cause of socialism!

INTRODUCTION

In the 1930's nearly the entire industrial proletariat of the United States rose up in massive strikes against the US capitalists for improved wages and working conditions, and for industrial union organization with trade union democracy. These militant struggles climaxed in 1936 with the defeat of the reactionary AFL craft union leadership in the basic industries, with the formation of the CIO and with the organization of industry wide unions in rubber, auto, steel, coal, glass, marine, electrical, etc. These victories in industrial unionism were the result of nearly 100 years of struggle by the US working class. Such struggle had meant bloodshed and death to Parsons and Spies, to many of the Molly McGuires, to hundreds of workers in the Knights of Labor and in the Industrial Workers of the World and to many workers who had organized under the banner of the Trade Union Educational League and the Trade Union Unity League (both had been a part of the AFL and were given political leadership by the CPUSA). However, it took the sharpening contradictions of US and world capitalism, revealed in all their brutality by the overproduction crisis of 1929 and the depression that followed, to create the necessary conditions for successful industrial union organization.

The 1929 crisis made clear the growing impoverishment of the working class against the growing wealth and profits of an ever smaller number of capitalist owners. In addition, it made clear to most of the industrial proletariat, as well as to many other sections of the working class, the bankruptcy of craft union organization and the corruption of the AFL leadership.

Already long before the crisis, the divisive effect of craft union organization and the class collaborationist policies of William Green, Matthew Woll, Ed McGrady and the rest of the AFL leadership was felt by many sections of the working class.

The AFL leadership had pursued a policy of preserving craft union organization by fighting all attempts at industrial organization. They maintained a no-strike policy and openly sabotaged many strikes. They confined the craft unions to skilled workers, refusing to recognize the unskilled. They discriminated viciously against Negro, Mexican and other national minority and women workers, fighting

to keep them out of unions. They drove workers into independent unions by neglecting their interests, and then united with the employers and the state to ruthlessly suppress and smash such organization. They furthered the interests of one craft union over another and encouraged scabbing within the same shop and between industries. They used gangster tactics and physical violence to maintain their control in the separate AFL unions and in the AFL as a whole. They expelled individual workers and whole sections of unions that led militant strikes for improved wages, hours, working conditions and industrial organization. They crushed opposition through vicious red-baiting campaigns.

The AFL leadership worked hand-in-hand with the capitalists to defeat the massive strike wave of 1919 to 1922; to crush the industry wide strike in steel in 1919: they supported the importation of 30,000 Negro workers from the South as strike breakers. When the strike was broken, the Negro workers were thrown into the streets and jobs returned to Anglo-American workers. Such policies contributed to many "race riots" of that period.

In 1926 the AFL leadership expelled 12,000 victorious fur workers and their leaders and induced the manufacturers to deal with the repudiated leadership of the furriers. When the crisis hit only about 3,500,000 out of 33,000,000 workers were in the AFL. Such policies helped to keep the working class of the USNA unorganized, divided and defenseless in the face of growing attacks by the capitalist class. At the same time it guaranteed the AFL leaders autocratic control over the trade union movement.

With the crisis, William Green showed his true colors of betrayal as he led the AFL to back the policies of the Hoover Administration in support of payments to industry and reduction of wages, and against unemployment insurance.

Angered by the treachery of Green, spurred on by massive unemployment which reached 17,000,000 in the US by 1933, desperate from starvation, evictions and the general destitution of the depression, and driven by wage cuts, increase in hours and speed-up, both unemployed and employed workers began militant political struggles. Negro workers, most hard hit by the depression took the lead in many of these struggles, especially the struggles of the unemployed.

A National Unemployed Council, formed in 1930 in Chicago, held hundreds of demonstrations throughout the 30's against hunger, unemployment, evictions and for unemployed insurance. World War I veterans, unemployed and with no relief payments, organized a national Bonus March on Washington in 1932 to get bonus payments which weren't due them until the 40's. The veterans were attacked by a division of the US army under the command of General MacArthur.

Negro and Anglo-American sharecroppers in the Negro Nation organized the Sharecroppers Union in 1932. Immigrant workers mobilized against deportations under the International Labor Defense Organization. And industrial workers held massive strikes for industrial organization, union recognition, and improved wages and working conditions. For the first time in US history, unemployed workers as a whole refused to scab and break picket lines of striking employed workers.

The political struggles around unemployment in the early part of the 30's laid the conditions for successful industrial struggles. In turn the organization of workers in industry set the conditions for further political struggles with the industrial proletariat of the large shops in the lead.

In most of the major struggles and many of the minor ones, both of unemployed and employed workers, the Communist Party of the USA provided the primary political leadership. It was the leading role of the CPUSA that encouraged Negro workers to take the lead especially in the struggles of the unemployed. It was the influence of the CP that enabled workers in mass production industries to continue in their determination to form industry-wide unions and eventually the CIO.

The struggle for unity of the working class, led by the CP, created the conditions where unemployed workers refused to scab on employed workers and where employed workers fought militantly for unemployment compensation and jobs. Through these struggles, thousands of workers, including the most oppressed sections of the working class, were recruited into the CPUSA. However, the factionalism and rotten opportunism of the CP leadership and failure to give these workers Marxist training, eventually caused many fine proletarian fighters to leave the CP.

Under such conditions of misery and struggle, Roosevelt was sworn in as president in February 1933. While presenting himself as a friend and savior of the working class, he actually represented the Wall Street section of the US imperialist class. His role was to save American capitalism from destruction and to put the cap on the growing revolutionary struggle of the working class by responding with a few reforms.

Central to his program was the National Industrial Recovery Act (NRA) passed in June 1933. The NRA had two important aspects: centralizing government control over industry in order that it could once again prosper, and writing in Section 7 (A) which supposedly guaranteed workers the right to organize into unions of their own choosing and to bargain collectively with the companies. Many workers, including many in the Communist Party were fooled by Roosevelt, believing that he was acting in their interests.

They took Section 7 (A) as an incentive to accelerate their organizing struggles. The workers soon discovered that militant strikes and more importantly the unity of the working class were their only weapons to enforce the act. In nearly every strike, the government supported the companies against the workers and tried to break strikes with the police and the National Guard.

In 1935, the NRA was declared unconstitutional and replaced with the Wagner Act, better known as the National Labor Relations Act. This act was to guarantee workers the right to bargain collectively and the right to strike by prohibiting anti-union activities on the part of employers. What the law did in actuality was set up the National Labor Relations Board which allowed the government to mediate in disputes between labor and management with settlements in favor of the companies. (One person who was brought into the administration as government mediator for the NLRB was Ed McGrady, "experienced labor negotiator" and hated leader of the AFL.) If workers went on strike after a government settlement they were subject to attacks by the National Guard.

Nevertheless, strikes of industrial workers grew in militancy throughout the 1930's. "In 1933 more than 900,000 workers went on strike for union recognition and wage increases, three times the previous year. Trade union membership zoomed as 775,000 workers flocked into labor organizations, 500,000 into the AFL, 150,000 into inde-

pendent unions, and 125,000 into the Trade Union Unity League... The strike wave continued into 1934, when mass picket lines increased to nearly 1,500,000 workers. The year 1935 saw 1,150,000 on strike..." (1)

Companies responded to strikes by setting up company unions, or trying to sabotage strikes by shipping in scabs and getting court injunctions. In addition, they hired vigilantes such as the Klan and the Black Legion to attack strikers. Nearly every strike was dubbed a "communist plot" or a "communist insurrection."

The Roosevelt government reacted by developing programs that effectively supported the companies, attacked the workers with clubs and gas from the local police or the machine guns of the National Guard. In 1935, "some 18,000 workers were dragged from the picket lines, arrested and jailed. From 1934 to 1936, 88 workers lost their lives in strikes." (2)

The unbearable conditions in the factories, heightened by increasing unemployment, laid the conditions for the industrial union movement.

Throughout 1934 and 1935, the AFL unwillingly granted membership to workers who were forming industrial unions spontaneously in rubber, steel, auto, etc. They issued "federal charters" to these new unions declaring that as soon as they had the time the industrial unions would be divided among the crafts. They then sent AFL organizers to all the main industrial centers, their aim, not to organize but to prevent strikes and to check the militancy of the workers. By 1935, the AFL had a membership of only 3,045,347 workers, with about 35,000,000 workers unorganized in the country.

Following the San Francisco General Strike of 1934, the AFL had no choice but to hold their national convention in San Francisco that fall. During the convention, both the militant motion of the working class and a growing split within the AFL were clearly evident. Fourteen resolutions for industrial unionism were introduced.

By the time of the AFL Atlantic City Convention in October, 1935, the AFL was clearly split into two factions. The majority faction, led by Green, supported the old guard craft union policies of the AFL. The minority faction, led by John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers, supported the closed shop and industrial union or-

ganization. Lewis did not take this position out of any great love for the working class. The history of gangsterism and sell-outs within the United Mine Workers was proof that Lewis never intended to lead a real struggle for democratic, industrial unionism in the interests of the workers. Rather, he understood the rising developing motion of the class and seized the opportunity to take the leadership of the struggle, thereby securing for himself a good position. Lewis went with whoever would provide him with power and fame for himself.

During the 1935 AFL Convention, a clash took place between Lewis and Willy Hutchinson that was symbolic of the struggle taking place in the entire working class between industrial organization and craft organization. Lewis was furious that the AFL Executive Council had scrapped the San Francisco industrial union resolution and was enraged when Hutchinson, president of the Carpenters Union and spokesman for Green, called for a point of order when Lewis was introducing the delegates from the newly formed United Rubber Workers of America. He laid a punch on Hutchinson so heavy that it knocked the 300 pound man to the floor. For the next few minutes the two men fought it out with Hutchinson coming up with a bloody nose.

A month after the convention, representatives of eight unions met and formed the Committee for Industrial Organization. The announced purpose of the CIO was to organize workers in mass production and other industries on an industrial basis, but still under the banner of the AFL.

Before the CIO could even open offices, the greatest torrent of strikes yet began to sweep the country and the CIO gained rapid recognition. In many of these strikes, the workers used the tactic of the sitdown strike, first used successfully at the Firestone plant in Akron, Ohio in January, 1936.

In such an atmosphere of ferment and struggle, the workers went out on strike at the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company in Akron, Ohio in February 1936. The Goodyear Strike was the first strike of the newly established Committee for Industrial Organization, and its first victory. An important aspect of the strike was that it was the first time that the federal government recognized a CIO union — The United Rubber Workers of America, Local 2 — as the only official union to represent Goodyear workers in negotiation

with the company. Government recognition came only as the result of many years of bitter determination and struggle by millions of workers, but it was key in defeating the influence of the AFL not only at Goodyear but also in other mass production industries.

The Goodyear strike was the pioneering strike of an historic movement of workers in rubber, auto, steel and other mass production industries throughout the nation to break the back of the open shop and gain industrial union recognition under the CIO.

In November 1936, the AFL suspended the CIO unions and in the following two years completed CIO expulsion from city and state federations. This only aided the growth of the CIO in its early days. Millions of workers joined the CIO so that by 1938 when the CIO changed its name to the Congress of Industrial Organization, there were nearly 4,000,000 members.

As I have already indicated, many previous efforts had been made to organize the mass production industries, but none had succeeded. The Goodyear strike was the first to prove that it could be done and provided encouragement to those who came later. In the final analysis, the Goodyear strike proved to be but the beginning of a movement that was irresistible when its time was ripe and when all the factors were present for its success.

My purpose in this pamphlet is threefold:

- 1) To discuss the events leading up to the Goodyear strike, strategy and tactics of the Goodyear strike, and to show the role of the CPUSA during the strike in winning the mass of the workers over to the line of the CP and the vanguard of the workers into the party. I will also show the shortcomings and errors in the work of the CP.
- 2) To correct certain gross inaccuracies and misconceptions of the Goodyear strike as told by John Williamson in his autobiography entitled, *The Dangerous Scott*, and to show how Williamson's opportunism was a reflection of the leadership of the CPUSA.
- 3) To say a few words that would try to demonstrate the relevancy of what happened in 1936 to the situation that confronts us today.

BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Akron is the largest city in Summit County, Ohio, near the center of the largest industrial region in the world. Out of a population of 300,000, 152,000 were workers newly imported from the mountains of West Virginia, Tennessee and Alabama. In addition, there was a foreign born population of 31,000 and a Negro population of 11,000. With World War I and the development of the auto industry, the rubber industry boomed, making Akron an important industrial city almost overnight. Between 1912 and 1920 Akron tripled in size.

Nearly everyone in Akron directly or indirectly was in the pay of the large rubber companies—the thousands of workers who sweated in the mills, the mayor, sheriff, police and the rest of the city and county workers, the newspaper publishers, small shopkeepers, restaurant owners, doctors, ministers and social workers.

The largest of all the rubber companies in Akron, and, in fact, in the world was Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. Goodyear employed anywhere from 14,000 to 16,000 workers and had gates that ran for 18 miles. The Company had been started by the Seiberling family but by 1919 was controlled by a New York holding company with Paul Litchfield as president. Back in 1919, Litchfield had set up the first company union in the country, the Goodyear Industrial Assembly, in order to control the workers. In 1931 he had instituted a 6-hour day or 36-hour week in the tirebuilding department. While hailed as a great act of benevolence, the 6-hour day was a necessity. Tirebuilders had the hardest job in the plant, and could not survive work for more than 6 hours a day.

The truck tirebuilders “were said by expert industrial engineers to be the most highly skilled workers in American mass industry. They built truck tires, partly by machine, partly by hand. They worked at a speed unequalled even in the auto shops. Their tires shoed the buses and heavy motor vans of the world. During the past years many of them had been off and on relief as they were taken on and laid off again at the factory. Since they were the aristocrats of the rubber shops, they made about \$25 a week when they worked—if they worked.” (3)

Conditions of extreme exploitation prevailed in all the rubber plants. From 1921 to 1931 there was an actual increase of 21,393,000 tires produced per year. Presumably this vast increase in production should have required the employment of many more workers. Actually, 7,155 fewer workers were employed in the industry which produced 21,000,000 more tires.

The government estimated that 42,691 workers were eliminated by the rubber industry from 1921 to 1931.

The figures on the weight output per man tell the story better, however, than any other comments in words or graphs. Starting with an index figure of 100 in 1914, the weight output per man rose to 250.56, in 1922 to 506.25 in 1929.

Then came the real push in the rubber shops. Between 1929 and 1930 the index of weight output per man increased to 581.03. Between 1930 and 1931 the index rose more than 100 points to 681.05. From 1931 to 1933 the weight output went up not steadily, but furiously.

In June 1933, union organization began in the rubber industry and other smaller shops in Summit County. Under the impetus of section 7 (A), William Tate, machinist and secretary for the Akron Central Labor Union (CLU) along with James McCartan, began to organize the rubber workers union. Thousands of men eagerly signed union cards and paid \$2.00 to join the newly-formed AFL Federal Rubber Workers Union.

But the companies refused to hold NRA-sponsored union elections as demanded by the government. Finally, under pressure from the AFL federal locals in Goodyear, Firestone and Goodrich, Claherty, AFL organizer in Akron, agreed to call for a strike vote in March, 1936, to force the elections. To avert a strike, and to put down the rebellious rubber workers, Bill Green, President of the AFL, called for a meeting in Washington two days before the strike vote was to take place. The meeting was between the Department of Labor, the officials of the rubber companies, the national leadership of the AFL, and the officers of the federal rubber locals. As Claherty got on the train to leave for the meeting, he told the rubber workers that no agreement would be signed unless the workers in Akron were consulted first.

Three days later Claherty and the three local union presidents were back in Akron with an agreement written by Bill Green that "settled" the strike. The agreement included four points, all of which had already been agreed to by all the parties at the meeting, and all of which sold out the interests of the rubber workers.

When Claherty finished reading the agreement to the rubber workers, they knew that the AFL had sold them out for the last time. Angered and with a hopeless desperation the workers voted in favor of the agreement, left the meeting and tore up their union cards. It would be a while before they could be convinced of the need for a union.

During the following months, the most determined workers began to fight the AFL leadership. Their plan was to press at once for a convention and insist that Bill Green grant an industrial charter. While preparing for the convention they would organize to prevent the appointment of Claherty to the presidency of the new union.

Under pressure from these workers, and on the advice from Claherty, Green issued a call for the first international convention of the rubber workers to be held on September 13, 1935.

A few days before the opening of the convention Green announced that the new union would be under the firm control of the AFL. With the aid of Tate and McCartan, who for years had battled the AFL leadership, a small grouping of men planned their tactics. By the time the convention began, the delegates were ready for all the tricks of Green and Claherty.

All of Green's proposals were defeated and he left the convention early. Sherman Dalrymple, a highly trusted Akron rubber worker, was elected President of the United Rubber Workers of America. At the end of the convention, Claherty made a bitter speech declaring the end of AFL support for the Rubber Workers union. But the rubber union delegates had won. They had at long last a union of their own.

Ohio Insulator Strike

It was around September, 1935 that I had a request from John Williamson, the District Organizer of the Communist Party in Ohio, to take over as Section Organizer of Summit County. Being a stranger

I was little acquainted with the forces the CP had in the city. So the section committee decided we should have a banquet to make my presence known.

Let me discuss for a moment the organization of the CP. It consisted of about 90 members in Summit County. Approximately 75 of these were workers, with about 30 who worked in rubber plants. The CP members were concentrated in Goodrich and Firestone. The others were spread throughout a number of smaller plants including plants in Barberton, a suburb right outside of Akron. The CP members in rubber had their connection with the rest of the rubber workers through the departments in which they worked or through the union. Some were shop stewards and a few held higher union positions. The CP members not in rubber were from different occupations, about evenly divided between men and women.

The CP was organized into branches in shops where there was a possibility of organization. For instance, there was a shop branch in both Goodrich and Firestone, but none in Goodyear. There was only one CP member in the Goodyear plant, and he had not been involved in the struggles of the workers there. Other sections of the CP were organized into mixed branches which included workers from different occupations, such as in Seiberling and Barberton. Still others were organized into street branches or worked in fraternal organizations of the CP, such as the IWO (International Workers Order). The IWO was divided into national groupings — Rumanian, Jewish, Yugoslav, and Hungarian. Many of these CP members were petty-bourgeois and resisted any kind of struggle. A few CP members were in the WPA and led some militant struggles of WPA workers in Summit County.

My first two months were spent preparing for the banquet, which was held in November. The fact that so many trade unionists, both from the AFL and the CIO attended a CP banquet was regarded as an important factor in the struggles of the workers then taking place and in future struggles of Summit County. About 400 people attended the party and the banquet was considered a huge success.

Following the banquet, I was involved in three main struggles before

the Goodyear Strike: the Ohio Insulator Strike in Barberton, the struggles of the WPA workers, and the Firestone sitdown strike.

The strike at the Ohio Insulator Company was significant because it forged an unbreakable unity between the workers of Barberton and Akron. In protest of a wage cut, the 300 workers at the Insulator Plant struck in the middle of September. For nine weeks they picketed the factory. They were hungry and had no coal to keep their children warm. Yet they stood 100 per cent united and organized.

On November 19, word went out that the company intended to break the strike by bringing in scabs. Early the next morning, the sheriff and scabs under the command of Colonel Johnston threw tear gas bombs into the picket lines at the factory gates. When the workers scattered, vomiting and crying from the gas, the sheriff drove a squad of limosines carrying scabs through the factory gates. The whole town mobilized and built barricades in the streets about two blocks from the plant in the workers' neighborhood. The barricades were intended to prevent anymore scabs from being brought in. This was the territory of the local police; the sheriff had no jurisdiction. The Barberton local police took no action.

That afternoon, when most of the men were at a meeting of the Barberton Central Labor Union, the sheriff attacked the barricades, this time brutally gassing and injuring the women and children and the few men who were standing watch. Word of the attack hit the town like a bomb. Within two hours, the whole insulator plant was surrounded by workers from many plants in Barberton. A committee of the CLU informed the sheriff that a general strike would be called for 6:00 AM the following morning if the sheriff didn't call off the scabs, agree to mass picketing at the plant and a 48-hour truce, effective at once.

The second night of the truce a meeting was held to discuss extending it. Many workers and members of the Barberton CLU were present including Francis Gerhardt, the president. The meeting went on for hours. Many speeches were made but no decision was reached. I was present at the meeting and asked to be introduced to Gerhardt so that I could meet with him. Gerhardt didn't know me and could not see the purpose of meeting with me. I told him that people at the meeting couldn't sit and talk any longer but must take imme-

diat action, not to extend the truce, but to get the scabs out of the plant. Gerhardt finally changed his mind and agreed to talk with me when I compared the situation in Barberton to a meeting in Chicago a short time before. There had been a national meeting in Chicago to discuss a joint national campaign for the defense of Tom Mooney and the Scottsboro boys. When some participants were arrested and jailed, the people at the convention discussed what to do and a whole room full of people decided to sit in the hall and wait for the prisoners to be released. Such a tactic was just a way to fool people, to undermine the struggle and only prevented action at a time when action should have been taken. If those at the Chicago convention had continued to sit, the prisoners would still be in jail.

In this case too, holding people in a meeting to discuss the extension of a truce was the wrong tactic and would prevent action. The situation demanded that all possible forces in Barberton and Akron be mobilized to get the scabs out of the plant and to end the strike. I suggested to Gerhardt that he present a proposal to the meeting in order to stir the workers of both Barberton and Akron to militant action to remove the scabs. The proposal should include a message be sent to the Akron CLU telling them of the situation, asking them to send all possible support to the insulator workers. In addition, the Barberton CLU should close all the shops in Barberton and send all the workers to the insulator plant to remove the scabs. Such a proposal was important for two reasons. It proposed immediate and militant action which was appropriate for the situation, and a living connection in struggle between the workers of Barberton and Akron.

Gerhardt presented the proposal and it was accepted and acted on. In a few hours all the scabs left the plant in the cars and trucks in which they had come.

Conditions for unity of action between the workers of Akron and Barberton had long been present, but no one had moved to bring them together. Even within the party in Summit County there had not been much united action between the CP branches in the different towns. The insulator strike forged unity in the CP branches as well as between the rest of the workers in Akron and Barberton.

Firestone Strike

Next I was involved in the Firestone sitdown strike. Firestone was significant because it was the first real sitdown strike of industrial workers in the US. The tactic of the sitdown was subsequently used in many other struggles, especially in auto, in the famous Flint sitdown.

The Firestone tirebuilders had learned about the sitdown tactic from Alex Eigenmacht, a printer in Akron who knew the effectiveness of sitdowns from his experience in Europe. The idea behind the sitdown was that the companies feared harming their expensive machinery. So when workers stopped work and sat down by their machines, the company was afraid to send in scabs to take their jobs or to forcibly remove them from the plant, or arrest them. Any such action could harm the machinery!

During the few weeks before the sitdown the company had tried to cut the base rate 40 per cent to speed the men up. The tirebuilders raised hell and got Murphy, the plant manager, to agree to only an 11 per cent cut. But even 11% was killing the men, who decided to stall on the rate so their wages couldn't be cut. Murphy sent in a company spy to see what was going on and to speed up the line. The company man tried to start a fight with Clay Dicks, the union committeeman and the company suspended Dicks for a whole week without pay while the rate was being negotiated.

This was going too far. The men figured that if the company got away with this, they could get away with installing the eight-hour day. With much secrecy and organization the tirebuilders, led by some union men, planned the sitdown. The men agreed to stay on strike until the management agreed to take back Dicks and fix the base rate.

At exactly 2:00 AM on January 29, 1936, the sitdown at Firestone began in the truck tire department. It instantly spread to all the other departments in Firestone Plant One. By the end of the first day all four shifts participated. For the next three days the workers moved freely throughout the plant, completely in control, doing no work, the machines silent. Foremen and plant management, completely beside themselves, did nothing. By the end of the third day,

Firestone Plant 2 was ready to support the strike with their own sitdown.

The Firestone management settled the strike quickly, fearing that a real strike might begin—a strike for recognition of the United Rubber Workers of America. The settlement allowed Dick's immediate reinstatement, three hours pay for every day lost and immediate negotiation on the base rate as well as three hours pay to all workers who lost time during the sitdown. (4)

Not only did the Firestone management want a quick settlement, but so did Mr. Buckmaster, the Firestone URWA local president. Buckmaster seemed to be playing a game with the workers in favor of the company.

It was well known that the main issue of the strike was the six-hour day. The newspapers had all been talking about it in connection with recent events at Goodyear.

Four months earlier, in October, 1935, Cliff Slusser, the factory manager of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, shocked Akron with the announcement that Goodyear would abolish the six-hour day and reinstitute the 8-hour day by January 1, 1936. This announcement was very serious for the people of Akron. It meant that all the other rubber companies would soon follow suit. It meant that at Goodyear alone at least one-fourth of all the workers would soon be laid off. For those still employed it meant the greatly increased speedup would extend two extra hours each day for the same starvation wages. With work already at inhuman speeds, it meant increased health problems and an early death for many of the tirebuilders.

A few hours after Slusser's announcement, Local 2 of the URWA announced that it would fight the eight-hour day to the end. This had little effect on either the company or the men in the plants. Most of the men were still not members of the newly formed union. A few days later, the union paraded in front of the Goodyear gates with signs, "Resist the 8-Hour Day; join the United Rubber Workers of America." They drew up a complaint to the United States government asking for a fact-finding committee to come to Akron. Inside the plant, the union used every effort to get the workers to join the union.

On October 22, 1935, the Goodyear Industrial Assembly, owner Paul

Litchfield's company union, voted down the eight-hour day. But by the middle of November, Litchfield proved that it made no difference if a company union went against the policy of the company; he installed the 8-hour day anyway.

On November 15, foremen went through the factory passing up the pitmen and tirebuilders—those sturdy troublemakers—to distribute layoff slips and mark up new 8-hour day base rates for girls on the looms, scattered mechanics and outside workers. The 8-hour day became a fact. Week after week more workers were to be shifted to the new schedule. By January 1, regardless of the union or the Industrial Assembly, all of Goodyear would go on the 8-hour day!

In response to the union petition for a government fact-finding committee Madame Perkins, Secretary of Labor, had appointed such a board for Goodyear on November 16. On January 6, the Fact Finding Board made public its final report on the Goodyear 8-hour day policy. While staying on the conservative side, the board came out against the company, against the 8-hour day, and against its methods for introducing the 8-hour day. It also came out against the company for its attitude toward the URWA.

Convinced that the URWA meant business, the workers began signing union cards.

The 15 to 18 CP members in the party's Firestone branch were already discussing the struggle over the 6-hour day with the men in the plant. All the tirebuilders seemed to be in favor of making this a main demand of the Firestone sitdown. But local URWA President Buckmaster never fought for this demand in negotiations with the company.

Following the workers at Firestone, Goodrich workers sat down on February 8 and 9, 1936. They were also protesting a cut in the base rate. Again the company settled quickly, fearing that the workers would go for union recognition.

During both of these strikes hundreds of workers signed up with the URWA. The local union presidents, along with Sherman Dalrymple, president of the URWA, and the negotiating committees of workers from the plants discussed the settlement with the companies. But in neither case did the workers go all the way and struggle for or gain union recognition. Without union recognition, no settlement could

be lasting or binding on the company. This was the principal thing which distinguished the Goodyear strike, which followed a couple of weeks later, from the strikes at Firestone and Goodrich.

THE GOODYEAR STRIKE

On Friday, February 14, 1936, the tirebuilders of Goodyear Plant 2, Department 251-A, shut off their machines and sat down to protest the layoff of seventy men, dismissed, they believed, in preparation for installation of the 8-hour day.

By the end of the first day of the sitdown, it was clear to the workers that the Goodyear management was not going to settle the dispute with the tirebuilders as easily as the management of Firestone and Goodrich. Paul Litchfield had a different attitude toward strikes. He considered them a challenge, believing that most of "his" rubber workers were loyal Goodyear employees and that the few who weren't could be worn down through a prolonged struggle. At 9:30 on the evening of February 14, Fred Climer, the Goodyear personnel manager notified the 137 striking tirebuilders that they were all fired. He then locked the men in the tirebuilding room.

At 2:00 AM, February 15, Local 2 URWA pulled the men out of the plant saying that their battle could be fought better on the outside. "You've got to spread the idea of fighting the 8-hour day," the union men said. "One department fighting it ain't enough. They got you locked up in there. Come on out and tell the boys what you think. We can always start more sitdowns!"

While the tirebuilders slept, the union negotiated with management. By the time the strikers came to the union office Saturday the company had agreed to void the dismissals of the 137 strikers. But the men were not impressed. The company had said nothing of returning to work the 70 men who were laid off earlier in the week. They said nothing about base rate cuts, layoffs, speed-up, or the 8-hour day. These were the real issues.

Throughout the weekend, fury and excitement ran high among all rubber workers in Akron. Union halls of Goodrich, Firestone and

Goodyear were packed with men holding department meetings, discussing what to do about the 8-hour day, and signing union cards. The rubber executives, frightened that something big was happening, held their own meetings.

On Monday, February 17, the union, representing the 137 tirebuilders, resumed negotiations with the company on the question of the 70 layoffs. Late that afternoon, the newspapers announced the annual profit statement to the Goodyear stockholders by President Paul Litchfield. Goodyear's net profits for 1935, the *Beacon Journal* reported, totaled \$5,452,240.07 compared to \$4,533,964 in 1934.

That evening, as the union hall began to fill for a report from the negotiating committee on the 70 layoffs, the men talked of nothing else but the five and a half million that had been wrung out of their hides with speed-up, base rate cuts, layoffs and the threat of the 8-hour day. That night the remaining Goodyear workers voted to strike beginning with the 12:00 midnight shift.

John House, the Goodyear Local 2 union president was beside himself. This wasn't the way strikes were called. Many of the men who voted were not in the union, and the company had not been served notice. The rubber workers could care less. Within minutes after the vote was taken, the men spontaneously organized a picket line for the main gate of plant one.

Late February 17, 1936. the Goodyear strike of 14,000 rubber workers was on.

Almost immediately, the workers brought organization to the strike which began very spontaneously. Because of the attitude of Paul Litchfield and the rest of the Goodyear management to the sitdowners, the men made preparations for a long strike. Local 2 union hall of the URWA, across from the main gate of the plant, became the strike command center. A Goodyear striker volunteered to be captain of the thousands of men and women pickets. He was so well-known and respected by the workers that the executive committee of Local 2 accepted him for that job.

There were about 160 gates for the plants covering about 18 miles of company property. Each of the gates had to be manned by pickets

24 hours a day so that the company couldn't bring in any scabs. The strikers were assigned to gates. Almost immediately 160 extremely well constructed picket shanties were built out of old pieces of wood and tar paper, one for each gate, to shield the pickets from the cold. Ash cans were hauled to the picket sites and fires built in them to give the strikers warmth. Traveling automobile crews of picket line supervisors surveyed the gates of the vast strike outposts, boosting morale, and getting the latest news from the picket posts.

The picket line supervisors were followed by lunch trucks carrying sandwiches and hot meals for the pickets. A loudspeaker truck turned up for street meetings of the strikers. The union closed off east Market Street, the main street of east Akron and rerouted the streetcars.

Everyone in Akron was aroused by the strike. Even the most frivolous bridge-playing West Hill wives understood that this was class against class. For days before the strike, rival rubber owners had been shaking their heads over the obstinate Goodyear labor policy. Now criticism ended abruptly and all the West Hill capitalists banded together to fight to the last ditch for their common interests. Charles A. Stillman, Goodyear vice-president, turned up at Mayor Schroy's office early in the morning to demand enforcement of "law and order." He was flanked by Stacy Carkhuff, Firestone secretary, and S.M. Jett, secretary of Goodrich.

On the other hand, rubber workers from all the plants in Akron and Barberton, along with other industrial workers, bus drivers, maids in the hotels, carpenters and shop keepers, all were excited by the action of the Goodyear workers.

The strike went on for 33 days through one of the worst winters in Ohio history. Much of the time it was below zero. A number of times it reached 13 below. The bitter cold was accompanied by terrible blizzards. But the strikers, bundled in heavy coats and blankets, withstood the cold, a court injunction, attacks by the local police, and threatened attacks by vigilante groups and the National Guard. They staunchly held out for a signed contract.

At the end of the third day of the strike, the strikers adopted a full program of demands at a meeting of Local 2, URWA. They also

voted to make the strike an official URWA strike. In the following days they won support from Sherman Dalrymple and the national URWA, as well as from the rubber workers and URWA locals at Goodrich and Firestone.

Wilmer Tate, President of the Akron CLU got all the CLU unions to vote unanimous and complete support for the strike. This support included men to help on the picket lines, publicity, and money for food and other needed supplies. At one point during the strike the CLU unions voted unanimously to call a general strike and shut down all of Akron if the picket lines were attacked by the police, National Guard or vigilantes. The Union of WPA workers in both Barberton and Akron voted full support for the strike and worked actively in getting people to help on the picket lines and in the union soup kitchen. They also solicited money and food to aid the strikers.

By the sixth day of the strike the CIO declared the Goodyear strike the first official strike of the CIO. The CIO sent some of their best organizers and public relations experts to aid the local URWA leadership because the new URWA had little strike experience. Also, the CIO set up a defense committee to fight the company injunction against mass picketing and to aid in other legal fights. Finally, the workers mobilized every other possible force to gain public support for the strike from the rest of the people in Akron.

The local Akron papers, the *Beacon Journal* and the *Times Press*, while both opposed the strike, were forced to open their pages equally to comments from the union and the company. One of the radio stations, WJW, allowed the workers radio time. The other Akron station was the mouthpiece for the company. A shop-keeper in town turned over his storeroom for daily meetings of the picket captains and other militant workers.

Throughout the strike the position of the workers remained very strong. Most of the workers signed union cards. The morale of the strikers was very high even during the most crucial and difficult periods of the strike. Very few scabs ever got into the plant. A signed contract was won on the 33rd day.

The Role of the Company

From the first day of the strike the Goodyear management refused to negotiate with the union on any of the main strike demands. Paul Litchfield claimed that he didn't know why the workers were on strike. He stated that most of the 14,000 workers were loyal employees of Goodyear and that they were being prevented from working by 600 men. Litchfield used every form of intimidation to get the strikers to back down. Since he had killed the Goodyear Industrial Assembly (the company union) with the struggle over the eight-hour day, he could no longer rely on these workers to do his dirty work. He had to create another force.

During the first few days of the strike, he formed an organization of "non-strikers", headed by a company foreman. These "loyal Goodyear employees" went to Mayor Schroy's office claiming that they wanted to work and demanded that the Mayor send police to break the picket lines so that they could return to work. Litchfield's hope was that these "non-strikers" would also be able to win public opinion away from the strikers.

Next he brought into the plant, through a private tunnel that ran under the street, his own flying squadron or private army to use force against the strikers if necessary. This army was armed with \$13,063 worth of gas bombs and \$2,640 worth of guns and bullets, which the company had purchased since January in anticipation of the strike. Both Mayor Schroy and Sheriff Flower firmly supported the company, but both hesitated to use force to break the picket lines. As elected officials they feared that they would not be re-elected the following term. Sheriff Flower was already in serious political trouble for the gas bomb raid he had led on the women and children during the Insulator strike in Barberton.

Seeing that little open cooperation was coming from the local authorities, Litchfield petitioned the Governor for National Guard troops. But the Governor refused, saying that it was a local matter. Litchfield then got some of the best lawyers in the country to secure a court injunction against mass picketing at the gates of the plant. With an injunction, the mayor and the sheriff would be forced by law to clear the gates and open the plant. By the fourth day of the strike, the company went to court to get the injunction.

All six Summit County Common Pleas judges nervously took the case. No single judge would handle it, and no group of three judges would handle it. All feared public sentiment and especially the power of the union. The following day, the full bench of common pleas judges prohibited mass picketing at the Goodyear Company by a sweeping blanket injunction. Twice the Mayor sent police to clear the main gate of the plant, each time unsuccessfully. The first time the strikers from Goodyear and supporting tirebuilders from Goodrich and Firestone as well as WPA workers beat back the cops with clubs, chains, pipes and pieces of rubber. The second time the police refused to attack the workers.

Unable to obtain enforcement of the injunction, Litchfield stepped up his battle to gain public support through the newspapers and the radio. One day he would present the position of the company as that of a "sinned against innocent child," pleading with the public to come to his aid. The next day he would come out with vicious attacks and slanders against the union, saying that the whole strike was being led by a bunch of spies and communist traitors. Both the *Beacon Journal*, the more conservative Akron paper, and the *Times Press*, the so-called liberal paper, supported the company and opposed the strikers, but both stood opposed to the National Guard coming into Akron.

Toward the end of the strike, John Knight, editor of the *Beacon Journal* and a real estate man in Akron, broadened his position in the interests of the strikers. He came out opposed to any form of violence against the strikers. This position was significant because the company was wildly fanning the flames of hatred among the population of Akron as a whole, and in particular among the Klan and other fascist gangs.

About the ninth day of the strike, Ed McGrady, Assistant Secretary of Labor, a government negotiator and an old AFL organizer, flew to Akron to arbitrate between the company and the union. McGrady was a rat and had a long history of breaking strikes by negotiating settlements in favor of the companies. The way he worked was to get the strikers to go back to work with no signed contract on the verbal guarantee from the company that a contract would be worked out once the workers were back on the job. Once back to work, negotiations would go on for months until all the guts were worn out of the demands and out of the workers themselves. Goodyear

knew McGrady's pattern. To fool the union and weaken its position, Litchfield made it appear that he was opposed to McGrady and government negotiations. After two days of unsuccessful talks McGrady left Akron only to return about a week later to resume negotiations on the old pattern. Once again McGrady was forced to leave, this time by the workers.

As the strike wore on it became clear to the management of Firestone and Goodrich, as well as to executives in auto and steel, that if the Goodyear strikers won this strike with the aid of the CIO, then the same thing might happen in other companies and industries. They put pressure on Litchfield to negotiate. Also many people in Akron were becoming weary of the strike. The company knew that if they showed a willingness to negotiate, the tide of public opinion might shift against the strikers to the side of the company.

On the 20th day of the strike, the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company agreed to a secret conference with the negotiating committee of the United Rubber Workers of America. In a surprise attack on the 23rd day, the company announced their proposed settlement in the newspapers. This announcement made it appear that both the union and the company had agreed to the proposals and that the company was being magnanimous in announcing the settlement first. In fact, no settlement had been reached. The company announcement put the union in a weak position. With anti-union sentiment being whipped up all over Akron, the union had no choice but to vote on the company proposals, or risk the possibility of many Akron people turning against them.

To force the rubber workers to vote in favor of the "peace plan" the company formed the Akron Law and Order League, a vigilante group headed up by ex-Mayor Nelson Sparks and backed up by \$15,000 of Goodyear money. If the union rejected the proposals, the terror of the Law and Order League would be unleashed on the picket lines. When the workers voted, they accepted the harmless company proposals while rejecting and amending others. They then sent their negotiating committee back for more talks with the company. Regardless of the compromise vote, the company charged full rejection of the proposals by the strikers and mobilized to enact their plans for a violent attack on the picket lines. The union mustered all possible forces against the company, won a new set of proposals from them, and won a signed contract on the 33rd day.

Role of the Party, Most Advanced Workers and Other Forces in the Strike

When the Goodyear rubber workers first went on strike on February 17, 1936, they had almost total support from all 14,000 workers. They proved from the outset that they could organize an effective strike apparatus. What they lacked was political and tactical leadership. To win the strike and maintain the support of the workers, they had to be united around a correct, clear comprehensive program of demands. As the strike developed, they also needed correct information on issues and correct tactics. Without this they could not get the strikers to stand firm through the most difficult periods of the strike and they could not win the support of other forces necessary to win the strike.

There were three main groups that came forward to provide leadership to the strikers; the URWA, the CIO, and the Communist Party together with the most militant fighters in Goodyear and the other rubber plants. The URWA and the CIO were able to provide organizational leadership. But the only force that was able to provide political leadership was the Communist Party.

Sherman Dalrymple, International President of the newly formed URWA, was highly respected by nearly all the rubber workers for his progressive fight to help form the URWA. Throughout the Goodyear strike he supported the workers in their stand against the company and got other URWA locals at Goodrich, Firestone, Mohawk and Seiberling to give active support to the strikers. At one point during the strike Dalrymple threatened to extend the Goodyear strike to the whole rubber industry.

The three URWA locals, at Goodyear, Firestone and Goodrich, also gave leadership to the strike and as a whole followed the direction of the international union. However, each of the local union presidents pursued a different attitude toward the companies. John House of local 2 at Goodyear often did not understand the issues and therefore did not know how to maneuver. As a result he took a vacillating position toward the company, often in opposition to the interests of the Goodyear workers. This was primarily due to his lack of union experience.

House's attitude toward the Communist Party and toward me in

particular was very bad. At one time during the strike however, he asked me to come to a union meeting and speak on the question of allowing workers who had been opposed to the strike to join the union. For the most part he was referring to the "non-strikers" or "loyal Goodyear employees." I told him "no", these workers should not be allowed to join since many were foremen or company agents and spies. When these "non-strikers" asked to join the union, they were refused.

Mr. Callahan, President of the Goodrich local, was generally a progressive trade unionist and continued a militant line in the interests of the workers. However, he was afraid of having any direct connection with the CP. Several times he tried to get union members who were in the CP out of the Goodrich local. Once he asked me to come to his home to discuss issues, but in public he acted as if he didn't know me. At one public meeting when his son waved to me, he got upset and let his son know that he didn't want to have anything to do with me.

Then there was Mr. Buckmaster, President of the Firestone local, who had a very friendly attitude toward the company. As I have already stated, in the Firestone sitdown strike, the men were upset about the cut in the base rate as a prelude to reinstating the eight-hour day. The CP members in Firestone had raised the six-hour day as one of the main issues in the strike. But Buckmaster would not fight for it even though it was one of the main demands of the majority of the workers. During the Goodyear strike when the Goodyear program of demands was raised as a program for workers in all the rubber plants, Buckmaster refused to introduce it in the Firestone local.

Toward the end of the Goodyear strike a number of CP members found copies of a Trotskyite leaflet in Buckmaster's office. The leaflet was an attack against the workers at Goodyear regarding the final proposed settlement with the company. The leaflet was intended to break the strike by breaking the morale of the workers. It was also intended to present the CP in a bad light in the eyes of the workers. Although we could never prove it, it appeared that Buckmaster had cooperated with the Trotskyites in issuing the leaflet.

The CIO provided leadership to the strike. They declared the Goodyear strike the first strike of the CIO and helped to secure govern-

ment recognition for the URWA as the only official body to represent the workers at Goodyear.

The three most influential CIO organizers in Akron were Rose Pesota, a well known member of the International Ladies Garment Workers from the east; Adolph Germer, who was an old socialist, and Power Hapgood who was a leader of the miners. The CIO organizers gave advice to the URWA on all the main questions of the strike, presented the case of the Goodyear strikers to the government in Washington, and sat in with the union negotiating committee when they met with the company.

Through some of their best publicity experts, the CIO was able to get national coverage for the strike and gain national recognition and support for the strike from the whole labor movement. They also went on radio in Akron, and put ads in the Akron papers so that the local population would continue to support the strike. A few times they traveled to Michigan to get support from the auto workers. They sent in lawyers to provide the necessary legal support to the strike, which included challenging the injunction and setting up a defense committee for other legal problems.

Overall the CIO played a very positive role in the strike. However, they also fell into the trap of McGrady and the Goodyear Company on the question of negotiations. The attitude of the CIO toward the CP was pretty good.

The CP was the only force in the strike that was able to provide the correct political and tactical leadership. This was key to winning the strike. I first heard about the sitdown at Goodyear from the newspaper. But a day or so later, two rubber workers, Eric Spitzer and Bob Gamble, visited me at the CP office and said that Local 2 at the Goodyear plant had a sit-down and the workers were now ready to walk out of the plant. This was just the thing we wanted since the CP had no active members at Goodyear.

These two men were not in the CP, but were sympathetic. At one time they had attended a CP trade union school which was held in Akron. Both men could see the assistance and help the CP could give the strike if there were cooperation between the union, the strikers and the CP.

From my point of view as CP organizer, the role of the CP as a revolutionary party was to advance the understanding of the workers not only in the economic field, on the immediate struggles and conditions in the plant, but in the political field as well, on the immediate and long term political purposes of the strike. Our role was not only to help the workers win the strike, but to win them over to the side of communism. Therefore, the issues had to be thought out very carefully. We had to work step by step, first putting the issues of the strike to the workers in a way they could understand. Then, by winning their respect through correct leadership on the immediate issues, we could present to them a broader political perspective.

During the strike there were three crucial issues that arose. First, and most important was the correct formulation of the strike demands and the tactics necessary to win the workers over to these demands. The second important issue was winning the workers, the local union leadership and the CIO representatives to an understanding of Ed McGrady's strike breaking tactics. The correct tactics had to be used to expose and defeat McGrady. The third important issue was the final settlement with the company and gaining the support of the workers for a compromise settlement without compromising the overall strike demands.

In my first meeting with Spitzer and Gamble, we discussed the strike and how best to win the workers' support for the full program of demands. As regards the issues of the strike and demands, Spitzer and Gamble made the greatest contribution, since I had been in Akron only a few months and most of that time I had been occupied with organization of the CP and with other struggles. We wrote a leaflet that discussed the eight-hour day and wage cuts, and that cited facts from the report of the government fact finding board and from the Goodyear profit statement. The leaflet encouraged the strikers to stand firm on the issues and to insure the success of the strike by organizing and building Local 2 of the United Rubber Workers of America. The leaflet concluded with a program of strike demands:

1. Continuation of the six-hour day.
2. No layoffs.
3. No wage cuts.

4. Ten percent over base rate and no more speed-up.
5. A signed agreement.

Later, through the influence of the section committee of the CP, two other demands were added. 6. That Local 2 Executive Committee of the URWA have equal rights with the company to speak and negotiate on all questions of importance to the workers. (This demand was important because the company said that the union didn't have the right to speak on certain questions such as the wages), also 7. The company could not discriminate with the threat of loss of jobs and other reprisals against any of the workers who went on strike.

Since there was no time to consult with other rubber workers about the demands, the leaflet was put out on the information of Spitzer and Gamble, with the full agreement of the CP Section Committee, under the name of the Communist Party. The program of demands was also adopted by the Section Committee as the CP program for all the other rubber plants in Akron and Barberton. Within hours after the leaflet was printed, CP members distributed it to pickets at all the gates of the Goodyear plant and to workers at Goodrich, Firestone, Mohawk, Seiberling and a few small rubber plants in Barberton.

At the first meeting with Spitzer and Gamble, we also discussed how best to get the Goodyear workers, the leadership of Local 2, the national leadership of the URWA and the other rubber locals in Akron to support and fight for these demands. We knew that while many of the workers would agree with the demands, they might hesitate to support them because the leaflet had been issued by the CP. In the case of House, the task would first be to win him over to the demands.

We decided that the best way to convince all the workers of the need for a full strike program, was to get together the most militant fighters at Goodyear and the other rubber shops and discuss the demands with them. Since Spitzer and Gamble knew the men, they called the meeting for the first day of the strike and invited only those who they knew were the most advanced workers. A man in town turned over his storeroom for the meeting. About 90 workers showed up, including picket captains and other militant workers. These men represented some of the best leaders of the strike.

Spitzer and Gamble chaired the meeting along with one member of the CP who was not in Goodyear. Most of the workers present knew that the meeting was called by the CP and while many did not believe in the CP they agreed to discuss the leaflet and finally voted enthusiastically to accept the demands. Once back on the picket lines, they got the rest of the workers to agree to support these demands.

On the second day of the strike, the militant workers met again and this time voted to expand their program for the strike. They agreed to five points: 1) to make the strike a legal URWA strike, 2) to get the strikers to join the union and grant them full voting rights, 3) to force negotiations with the company on the basis of the previous demands, 4) to hold the picket lines no matter what, injunction or no injunction, and 5) to win public opinion by putting the case of the strikers more strongly before the community.

By the third night of the strike the workers were convinced of the seven demands and the rest of the proposed tactics.

At a meeting of the Section Committee of the Communist Party, we carefully assessed the situation. The negotiating committee of Local 2 had made a stupid move in the first place in agreeing to secret negotiations and even they were surprised by the Company's announcement. The Goodyear workers were furious with the proposals, because they failed to deal with the most important strike demands, particularly the demands for a signed agreement and union recognition.

Taking into consideration that public opinion was mounting against the strikers' it was clear to the CP that the union couldn't appear too bullheaded. The workers had to show a willingness to accept at least some of the company proposals. In such a way public sentiment would stay with the workers and the newspapers would be forced to report that the union was sensible and could not be blamed for prolonging the strike.

Bill Ricketts, who was one of the picket captains, a few CP members and I worked on a resolution nearly all night, that could be presented to the militant workers' meeting for approval and then to all the workers for approval at the Sunday Armory meeting. When completed, the resolution stated: that the union agree to accept company

point 1 but with the addition of a clause stating that the men return to work within seven days. That the union agree to points 2 and 3 as written. On point 4, that the union ask for a straight 6-hour day in all divisions. On point 5 regarding the company's offer to make lay-off lists in duplicate, that the union ask for the lists to be in triplicate, one copy to go to the union. In addition, the resolution called for the negotiating committee to go back to Goodyear and demand that the company stop financing the Goodyear Industrial Assembly and institute a straight seniority policy throughout the plant. The resolution also called for company recognition of URWA union negotiations committees for each department. With such a compromise settlement the strike could be saved for the workers and not antagonize the town.

The CP proposal was presented at the next meeting of the militant workers and the situation was explained. These leaders accepted the proposal and decided that Bill Ricketts should present the resolution at the Armory meeting.

House recognized Ricketts to present the resolution at the meeting and the workers accepted it. Just as expected, the newspapers pre-presented the union as sensible, stating that they had accepted two points of the company's offer and sent the negotiating committee back to bargain more with the management.

However, Goodyear management stated that they refused to negotiate further with the union, charging that the strikers' action represented full rejection of their offer. Immediately, Litchfield increased his hate campaign and threatened to call in the National Guard if the strikers refused to accept the full company offer.

The tension in Akron was very high! Frank Grillo, the Secretary-Treasurer of the International URWA, went on radio all night the evening of the 29th day, asking the strikers to stay alerted to the station, ready for action, in the event that the company decided to take the Goodyear plants by force. Interspersed between music, Grillo gave regular reports on the situation at the plants and a CIO representative spoke. The company didn't attack the lines and on the 30th day of the strike resumed negotiations with the union. The final company offer was released on the 32nd day.

Almost immediately, the CP recognized the importance of the meeting of militant workers (vanguard elements of the proletariat) and agreed to continue to hold them nearly every day of the strike. The numbers of workers participating grew from 90 to about 300. Of the advanced workers about 300 were considered safe; and had potential to be recruited into the CP. Not only Goodyear workers came, but also active and influential workers from the other rubber plants. Most of the workers knew the meetings were called by the CP, but felt free to express their own and other rubber workers' ideas. As the strike developed, these meetings became the political center of communication and a key force in maintaining the support of the workers and in winning the strike. Spitzer and Gamble and two other CP members who were not from Goodyear, would present the political ideas and tactics which the CP thought best and the other workers would present their ideas. Through such an exchange we were able to develop the best policies in the interests of the strikers.

The next important issue that arose during the strike was exposing Ed McGrady and developing the correct tactics to get him out of Akron. At the meetings with the most advanced workers, we told the guys that McGrady used to be an organizer for the AFL and then the government took him on as Assistant Secretary of Labor and negotiator in labor disputes. The fact that he had worked in a top position with the AFL was almost enough to convince the workers against McGrady. But more than that, it was important to show how he had worked in recent labor disputes and how he would work in Akron.

We reported how he had gone in to "settle" disputes in San Francisco, Cleveland, Toledo and elsewhere, each time coming into town with a big fanfare, making it appear that he was a big peace maker. Because we had a national perspective on the labor movement, we were able to forewarn and convince the active leaders in the strike to oppose McGrady. They in turn convinced others. In addition, the CP issued a leaflet which ran down McGrady's history of sell-outs, and I went on radio to tell how the man worked. When the union finally called a meeting to ballot on McGrady's back-to-work-while-negotiating plan, the workers booed and voted unanimously to stand united for a signed contract. Even CIO officials were amazed by the strikers' familiarity with the government conciliator's scheme. McGrady was forced to leave Akron.

The final important issue in the strike was the question of a compromise strike settlement, without compromising the overall strike. The "peace plan" of the company which Litchfield announced on the 23rd day of the strike included the following points:

1) All employees of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company as of February 12, 1936, shall return to work without discrimination or disruption of service record.

2) Management of the company will meet with any and all employees individually or through their chosen representatives.

3) Notice will be given to representatives of the employees affected of changes in wage rates before they are posted.

4) In the tire division, the company had adopted the 36-hour week, six-hour shifts. Any change in these hours per week or per day below 30 hours or above 36 hours a week will be by arrangement with the employees in the departments or divisions affected.

5) Lists of contemplated layoffs will be made in duplicate by the department foreman, one copy will be retained by the foreman and the other copy will be kept in the office of the labor department; both lists will be available for inspection.

At the last meeting of the militant workers, the CP congratulated the Goodyear workers for remaining steadfast during a very difficult strike. The picket captains and others were surprised at the position of the CP, some were even angry. They had received an unsigned leaflet that called the latest company proposals a sellout. The leaflet had been issued by the Spartacus League, a Trotskyite organization. But most of the workers thought it had been issued by the Communist Party. Rubber workers received very few leaflets, and most of these were issued by the CP. We explained the difference between a Trotskyite who works as a spy and agent for the company, and a Communist. We then pointed out what the workers had won through this settlement.

The most important feature of the contract was that Union shop committees won the right to negotiate with foremen on wages, hours and working conditions. While it did not grant full union recognition on paper, it was the real McCoy. Recognition of union shop committees meant that the men could go on from here and fight for full union recognition.

We also pointed out that an important aspect of any strike was

knowing the correct time to end it. The most important points had been won. The morale of the workers was still high. Now it was time to take a vote and carry the picket lines back into the shop to make certain that the agreement was implemented and that the union would fight all the way for full union recognition in the coming months.

We discussed what would happen once the strike was over. The Goodyear Company would claim that the union was defeated. Other companies would say the same. Mayor Sparks would say it. The Trotskyites would say it. But in fact the Goodyear strike was the greatest victory in modern labor history. If the strike were carried back to the tire machines and the mill rooms, it would indeed be the first page of CIO history.

The next day, March 21, 1936, the strikers jammed the Armory and the lawn outside and voted unanimously to accept the latest company offer. A great parade was held to celebrate the victory. Most of Akron cheered.

Other Aspects of CP Work During the Strike

In addition to meeting regularly with the vanguard elements of the rubber workers during the strike, the Communist Party also carried out other work. We met regularly with Wilmer Tate who had much influence in the Akron labor movement and who was very close to the CP. Tate supported many positions of the CP but never joined. We also met three or four times with Sherman Dalrymple. At one point Dalrymple held a meeting for the rubber workers to support the civil war in Spain against the Fascists. He chaired the meeting and spoke at it. A few times, we attended meetings called by the CIO representatives and the leadership of the local unions.

Amos Murphy, who was a CP member and head of the WPA workers' union in Barberton and Akron, got CP members and other union members in the WPA to continue support for the strike up to the last day. Members of the CP street sections came out to distribute party leaflets and help on the picket lines. One CP member sold *Daily Workers* openly on the street corners. (Later, he received a prize from the national leadership of the CPUSA for selling the greatest number of papers in the whole party.)

Out of the daily meetings of the most militant workers, the CP was able to recruit 125 people by the end of the strike. Spitzer and Gamble joined very early during the strike. Others however, had to overcome much anti-communism. A few had been in the Klan.

As a result of the CP's work in the Goodyear strike, and through their continued industrial work in Summit County during the following year, the whole membership base and orientation of the CP in Ohio changed from an organization of street branches to an organization with the industrial proletariat in the lead. The factories became the fortress of the party. This is the correct way for a communist party to be organized. Branches were formed in nearly all the departments at Goodyear and in the union local.

In the years between the conclusion of the Goodyear strike in 1936 and the conclusion of the Firestone strike for full union recognition in March, 1937, there were hundreds of sitdowns in Goodyear to implement the contract, and many more in the other rubber plants and industries of Summit County.

By basing the party in the large shops through the organization of rubber and other industries, the CP in Ohio was able to win the industrial proletariat to take a front line fighting role in political struggles during the three years following the Goodyear strike. Industrial workers, in turn, won over other sections of the working class and many progressives from the petty bourgeoisie.

We succeeded in gaining wide support for the anti-fascist war in Spain, for the war against the Japanese invasion of China, and for the struggle of the Jews against the Nazi terror. With the presidential election campaign in 1936, it was clear that fascist reaction was also developing in the US in preparation for an imperialist war. During the election campaign we raised the issues of the impending war and the development of fascism in the United States. In particular, however, we focused our attention on the reactionary trends in local and state elections.

The CP was influential in forming Labor's Non-Partisan League in Ohio. Labor's Non-Partisan League was an alliance of organized labor, small farmers and other progressives. It was viewed by the CP as a forerunner to a national Farmer-Labor Party which was to be

the expression of the United Front Against Fascism in the United States.

In the fall of 1937, Labor's Non-Partisan League ran a labor candidate on the democratic ticket but with a platform in support of labor. We pointed out that if elected Mayor Schroy would side with the capitalist class and support the fascist reaction that was developing nationally. He would rely on the American Legion, the Ku Klux Klan and the National Guard to attack the working class. The League also ran candidates throughout Summit County and the state of Ohio. They received many votes, especially in the Akron mayoral primary. However, because there were divisions in the labor front, the final election was lost. Soon after the election, Schroy called in the National Guard against the workers. Labor's Non-Partisan League, under the leadership of the CP, also exposed the reactionary program of the American Legion which attacked minority workers, as well as denouncing the open fascist terror of the Ku Klux Klan. Thus the CP took the lead in defending the rights of Negroes.

Like the strike at Goodyear, the Ohio electoral campaigns and the other political campaigns of the CP and Labor's Non-Partisan League were watched with great interest by both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie throughout the country, and were the forerunners of many similar political struggles. Even minor political victories could not have been scored without the corresponding struggle of labor in the plants.

While the Party provided much good leadership in the Goodyear strike and in the political struggles following Goodyear, there were also many shortcomings in our work. Most of these reflected shortcomings and problems in the CP leadership.

The first shortcoming of our work was the failure to provide adequate Marxist training to the new Party members who were recruited from Goodyear.

Since there were no active CP members in the Goodyear plant at the beginning of the strike, I spent most of my time working on the strike. It was important that I do this because of the vanguard role the Goodyear workers were playing in the whole labor movement. As a result however, I was not able to devote much time to my job as section organizer inside the party. Other members in Akron were not available to do the job. Some members were occup-

ied with work in their nationality organizations. Others were in street branches or with the WPA. Still others were in other rubber shops or other industries. Most of the members were new and had almost no Marxist training. They had joined through the WPA and thought the CP was a WPA union.

There just were not enough people to do the work. We requested help from both district and national leadership. Finally, the national CPUSA sent one person to help with the street sections. While Johnny Williamson, district organizer for Ohio, came a few times to help with the strike, we received no active support from the district. On the one hand this was understandable because requests for cadre were coming from all areas, and there weren't enough trained cadre to send. On the other hand, the situation was inexcusable, because Goodyear workers at that moment were in the lead of the industrial proletariat in the class struggle and should have been provided with trained cadre.

Williamson claims in his autobiography, *The Dangerous Scott*, that as soon as the Goodyear strike began he moved into Akron and lived through every minute of the strike. This was not true. It wasn't even until the third week of the strike that he called a district meeting to explain the conditions and significance of the strike to CP members and workers in auto, steel and the other basic industries. Even after the district meeting we were not able to get forces from the district to help in the strike.

As a result of the attitude of district and national CP leadership, much of the party work in Akron suffered, particularly in education. Most of the newer members could not do the job of training the new proletarian fighters who were recruited through the strike. While about 125 vanguard workers were recruited into the CP as a result of CP leadership in the Goodyear strike, many of them left due to a lack of training in the science of Marxism-Leninism.

This attitude of Williamson from the district and Browder from national leadership toward the Summit county section was not unique. It was a reflection of the general policy of the CP toward the quality of membership and education. The CP played a numbers game. According to the leadership, the test of the quality of a Party member was judged by how many *Daily Workers* he sold, how many workers he recruited, and how many struggles he led. There were lots

of meetings: membership meetings, public meetings, lots of speeches, but education was never regular or adequate. Quantity was placed above quality.

The second major shortcoming of our work during the Goodyear strike was the failure to outline an overall program in rubber, although a plan and a program were slowly worked out by the comrades in the course of the struggle. We did it this way: when there was an important question to solve, the comrades in rubber would get together with one comrade in the WPA and a growing number of comrades from Goodyear. We would discuss the question and make a decision. By word of mouth we would mobilize the other rubber workers to discuss the decision.

The third major shortcoming in our work was our failure to involve Negro workers in Akron and Barberton in the industrial struggles. While most of the industrial workers in rubber and other industries of Summit County were recent immigrants from Appalachia or immigrants from Europe, nevertheless, there was a small section of Negro workers in East Akron. They had been hardest hit by the depression. In the unemployed council they had taken the lead in the struggle and had been involved in some of the struggles of the WPA. Yet we failed to involve these workers in the Goodyear strike. In later political struggles of Labor's Non-Partisan League, the CP in Akron pointed out that the League could not consider its program progressive if we failed to include representatives of the Negro population as candidates for election.

A short time after the Goodyear strike, John Williamson attacked me at a district meeting for paying all my attention to industrial struggles and not organizing more street units. He also criticized me for neglecting other party matters, such as selling *Daily Workers* (we sold more *Daily Workers* than any other section). I recognize our errors in Akron and make a self-criticism for them, but his criticism was ridiculous and I left the meeting embittered. Williamson harmed and neglected the work in Akron while hollering about it. He was mechanical and rigid. Every party directive had to be carried out to a "t" or the party members caught hell.

I mention these characteristics of Williamson only because they were a reflection of Browder and the CP leadership in general. While

attacking other comrades, Williamson found it very hard to accept criticism. Yet Browder completely supported him. During that period and in many other periods the question of self-criticism opened up a field day in the CP. The purpose of criticism and self-criticism is to overcome mistakes, to advance the understanding of the membership. It's not an individual question alone, but goes much deeper. Among party leaders we saw the whole principle turned into self-adulation and self-interest. Whatever served the interests of the leading comrades was trumpeted and held up. It was a disgusting thing to see!

Williamson's autobiography is a good example. In speaking of the Goodyear strike, he presents many factual errors about the strike and the CP as well as about his own participation in the strike, trying to make the strike more glorious and glamorous than it really was. For the facts that are correct he makes no mention of the source of these facts, which was the best book written on the subject, the most honest and authoritative, Ruth McKinney's *Industrial Valley*.

LESSONS OF THE GOODYEAR STRIKE

The experience of the Goodyear Strike proved that while workers can spontaneously organize massive struggles against the capitalists correct Marxist-Leninist political leadership combined with the leadership of vanguard proletarian fighters is necessary for victory. Without such leadership, workers and union leaders may weaken, or use the wrong tactics.

The Goodyear strike also showed that continued victory lies not only in winning a signed agreement from the company, but in carrying the agreement back to the shops and fighting for the enforcement of the contract in each department. Continued success of a strike rests not only with economic victories in one factory; but must go beyond to further secure victories in other shops and industries and must begin to secure political victory in defense of the whole working class.

The political struggles in Ohio following the Goodyear strike showed labor struggles must be united to form a firm alliance of all workers and progressive forces in a united front against fascism. To gather together and organize all the forces necessary to carry the struggle on to socialism in a revolutionary manner.

Finally, Goodyear and the following struggles proved that the gains of a communist party can be lasting only if the party trains all of its members in the science of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian revolution. If it consistently puts forth the correct political line in practice, and if it purges itself of bourgeois tendencies.

PRESENT TASKS OF THE USNA WORKING CLASS AND ITS MARXIST-LENINIST COMMUNIST PARTY

The experience of the 1930's, shows us that unless the Communist Labor Party unites the Anglo-American working class through a United Front Against Fascism and the revolutionary struggle for reforms, supports national liberation struggles of colonial workers and fights for equal rights of national minority workers, the growing ferment of the working class will only achieve at best bourgeois reforms and result in worsening fascist attacks.

The struggle of the USNA working class and other progressives in this united front is not the solution to imperialist exploitation, economic crisis, unemployment, reaction and war. The united front is the defensive tactic of the working class, gathering together and organizing the forces for socialism which will enable the class to take the offensive, overthrow monopoly capitalist rule and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. The correct political leadership of a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party is necessary to accomplish this task. Today, we have far more odds to meet than in the thirties. In the 1930's the CPUSA had hegemony in the working class struggle. The only real opposition inside the working class was the reactionary Socialist Party in alliance with the counter-revolutionary Trotskyites. Today, there is a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party, the Communist Labor Party, but it is small and has not achieved hegemony over the working class. In order to build the United Front Against Fascism and to provide correct political leadership to the united front, we must at the same time build the CLP. In building the united front with a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party in the leadership, we must defeat the leadership and influence of the CPUSA and all the "left" organizations that follow in their trail. We must also expose and root-out the counter-revolutionary influence of the many Trotskyite organizations and "parties" which claim to be communist. Our party will accomplish this task only by consistently putting forth and practicing the correct Marxist-Leninist political line, as honest workers and as Communists, in the concrete revolutionary struggle of the workers for socialism.

JOIN US IN THIS STRUGGLE!

Footnotes

(1) Boyer & Morais, *Labor's Untold Story*, United Electrical Workers, Chicago, 1969, p. 276.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 276.

(3) McKenney, Ruth, *Industrial Valley*, Greenwood Press, New York, 1939, p. 257.

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 268.