

Robert Farrant, "Skilled Workers' Union Organizations in Springfield: The American Bosch Story" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Volume 24, No. 1 (Winter 1996).

Published by: Institute for Massachusetts Studies and Westfield State University

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Skilled Workers and Union Organization
in Springfield:
The American Bosch Story

Robert Forrant

In the 1930s, nearly every metalworking establishment in greater Springfield, Massachusetts, was non-union. These plants employed large numbers of highly skilled machinists and tool and die makers, and were the foundation for the region's nineteenth and early twentieth century economic success. In 1880, seven thousand workers produced heavy equipment and machinery. This increased by 1910 to 251 establishments and 12,361 workers. By the 1930s, Springfield was known as the "Industrial Beehive," with over three hundred firms and close to twenty thousand workers, producing and exporting machine tools, rifles, radios, and electrical equipment across the United States and all around the world.¹ When efforts were made in 1933 to organize the Chapman Valve Company, the Central Labor Union, an American Federation of Labor affiliate, cautioned workers "that the word strike be removed from their thoughts at the present time. . . . The intelligence of the workers and employers in this territory was adequate to cope with labor difficulties."² Until the 1930s, fairly peaceful relations existed between owners and machinists and

1. Michael Frisch, Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Meaning of Community, 1840-1880 (Cambridge, 1972); Felicia Deyrup, Arms Makers of the Connecticut River Valley, in Smith College Studies in History, 1948; United States Department of Commerce, Census of Manufacturers, various years.

2. This statement was made to Chapman Valve workers by Kenneth Taylor, president of the Springfield Typographical Union. Taylor also urged workers to form two separate unions, one for skilled pattern and moldmakers, and the other for machine operators and foundry hands. See Springfield Daily News, August 23, 1933.

metalworkers in western Massachusetts. But that was about to change.

In part, this accommodation was fueled by the fact that Springfield-area manufacturing wages were higher than other regions of the state, due to the large concentration of machine shops, foundries, machine tool builders, and metalworking establishments there. State surveys determined that average wages in Springfield were in the top five in the state throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. Skilled metalworkers believed that they could do well without a union.³ However, in the years between 1936 and 1941, several firms were unionized by the United Electrical and Radio Workers, and organizers then used this base to launch successful efforts up and down the Connecticut River Valley, from Bridgeport, Connecticut, to Springfield, Vermont. By 1939, the union represented workers across the Northeast who were responsible for the output of eighty percent of the United States electrical goods, from the smallest appliances like toasters and fans, to the largest electrical generators in the world.⁴

What follows is an examination of how industrial unions came to Springfield, and the role skilled workers played in this effort, with a specific focus on the American Bosch plant. The plant was constructed in 1911 by Robert Bosch, the founder of the German-based Bosch Magneto Company, on what had been farm land on the banks of the Connecticut River in the city's North End. Early photographs of the workforce show lab-coated machinists utilizing their skills in the production of electrical parts for the emerging automobile and truck industries. In 1920, the four-story plant was turning out fifty percent of all the electrical starter parts required by the American vehicle industry, and it employed three thousand workers. By the early 1930s, Bosch

3. Massachusetts Department of Labor and Industries, Annual Report for 1938, p. 49. Between 1925 and 1927, Springfield's average weekly pay for manufacturing workers stood at \$25.42, while Holyoke's and Lowell's were \$21.79 and \$19.13 respectively. Worcester, another metalworking center, was the highest, at \$26.38.

4. UE News, January 7, 1939, pp. 4-5. For example, in 1939 the union represented workers at the following companies: Emerson Electric, General Electric, Westinghouse, Delco-Frigidaire, Edison Storage Battery, Phelps Dodge, Allis Chalmers, Singer Sewing Machine, and Pratt and Whitney. Gross sales of the top twenty-six corporations in which the union had at least one local were almost one billion dollars.

products included fuel injection equipment for the aviation industry and radios.⁵

For twenty-two years, there was no labor organization in the plant, nor were there regular raises, holidays, or vacation pay. A worker's life was left to the discretion of management. Since the plant's production cycles were not well-regulated, the vast majority of workers never knew from one day to the next whether they would have a job. Aside from a small core of highly skilled tool and die makers and machine set-up specialists, men and women lined up outside the plant each day as early as 5:00 a.m., in the hope of being allowed to work in the plant and receive a pay check. Foremen had sole authority to decide who worked each day, and high seniority workers bristled under this system. As sporadic union organizing began in 1933 in Springfield, Bosch superintendent Donald Murray established a company union in an effort to give workers a voice, while at the same time destroying the efforts of the independent union organizers. Management, however, refused to accede to any requests from the company union. This was the situation found by Springfield's Matthew Campbell, president of the United Electrical Workers Westinghouse Local 202, during the summer and fall of 1936, when he began to conduct secret meetings with Bosch workers.

Campbell worked for fifteen years at Westinghouse as a skilled toolmaker before he became a leader of the city's industrial union movement. He played a lead role in 1933 and 1934 work stoppages at Westinghouse that led to the creation of United Electrical Workers Local 202. He was elected as the local's president in 1934, a position he would hold until his death in 1941. Before his death, he led successful organizing drives in many western Massachusetts companies, including Milton Bradley, Van Norman Machine, Package Machinery, and Worthington Pump. In 1935, he was elected as a regional vice president of the United Electrical Workers, and he eventually led the local out of the American Federation of Labor-affiliated Springfield Central Labor Union, and into the Congress of Industrial Organizations, where he became a state vice-president.

Campbell was born in Scotland in July of 1890, and he had lived in Springfield for twenty-five years. A disabled World

5. Orra Stone, History of Massachusetts Industries (Boston, 1930), p. 543. A great deal of the early plant history is contained in the union local's 25th anniversary special issue of the Local 206 Bulletin, which can be found in the Local 206 Collection, at the University of Massachusetts Archives, in Amherst.

War I veteran, he belonged to American Legion Post 21, the largest post in western Massachusetts. He was part of the city's large and skilled working class — a group that could afford a single-family house — and he was confident that metalworking plants would continue to provide employment for machinists and tool and die makers who resided in and around Springfield.⁶



Photograph, courtesy of the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum, Springfield, Massachusetts

Along with union organizing, Campbell helped to develop a labor electoral strategy, and in 1935 he became the Springfield United Labor Party's first candidate for mayor. He declared that the party was born out of the dissatisfaction and frustration that workers had with the Democratic and Republican parties, and their failure to "assist workers in securing just wages and decent living conditions." According to a party spokesman, "The organization of this labor party is a logical step accompanying the

6. Springfield City Directory (1934). Copies of the city directories can be found in the collections of the Connecticut Valley Historical Museum, in Springfield. See also Springfield Daily News, June 2, 1941, p. 8, UE News, May 19, 1941, p. 1 and June 7, 1941, p. 1.

development of labor unions whose voting strength is now so great it demands true representation." At the first meeting of the United Labor Party, an organizing committee was established to seek support from clubs, civic organizations, and other unions. Most of the committee members worked for large manufacturers in the city, including Westinghouse, Chapman Valve, Spaulding, and Bosch. The party organization process provided workers with an opportunity to discuss conditions in the various plants, while it afforded Campbell a way to showcase his organizing skills and to meet workers from non-union plants.⁷

At the end of September, the United Labor Party adopted its platform for the mayoral race. It called for public ownership of city utilities, the reorganization of city offices to avoid worker duplication, cash relief or work at prevailing union wages for the unemployed, and support for state and national legislation that would reduce the work week and secure old-age pensions. The party also sought to shift the city's tax burden away from small home-owners through more equitable taxation of large industries. In public meetings, party leaders directed their appeal to a broad coalition of "small-home owners, office employees, professional men and women, and the unemployed as well as factory workers." The platform pledged that the United Labor Party "shall always give preference to local products in its purchases, provided prices and labor conditions are up to our local standards."⁸

Campbell and his allies were aware of the weak political position of industrial workers in the city in the mid-1930s. To overcome this, the party structure and platform were designed to create a broad-based coalition. Campbell's nomination papers, for example, contained the names of several Westinghouse supervisors and foremen. The occupations of the United Labor Party candidates reveal the type of coalition being established, and the role that skilled workers were to play. Candidates included a plater and assembler from Chapman Valve, a toolmaker from the Fiberloid Corporation, a machinist from Spaulding, and a machinist, mechanic, tool grinder, final inspector, pattern maker, and production supervisor from Westinghouse. During the mayoral campaign, Campbell maintained his support among

7. Springfield Union, September 5, 1935, p. 1; September 10, 1935, p. 6; and September 11, 1935, p. 6.

8. Springfield Union, September 24, 1935, p. 6.

workers in the Westinghouse plant, and was reelected as Local 202 president, unopposed, while every other office in the local was contested.⁹

While Campbell attempted to build a broad coalition, the United Labor Party decided not to support any candidates who had been nominated by the Republican or Democratic parties, or by the city's small Communist party. But in a blow to labor unity, the Central Labor Union, which was affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, refused to endorse the United Labor Party candidates, and stated that it would not "be swayed or swerved into any political action by a mixed group of members and non-members, affiliated and non-affiliated unions, and by some individuals not members of any union." The president of the Painters Union, an affiliate of the Central Labor Union, broke ranks and supported Campbell and the United Labor Party, arguing that the current thinking that labor should "defeat our enemies by electing our friends" needed to be updated to "defeat our enemies — elect our own." But the appeal fell on deaf ears, when two weeks before the election the Central Labor Union endorsed the Democratic candidate for mayor. In one final blast, the Central Labor Union labeled Campbell "self-anointed, self-appointed, and self-seeking," and warned that his efforts would "lead the people of Springfield to judge the strength of labor by the sorry results you are about to achieve."¹⁰ Undeterred, the United Labor Party continued to appeal to Springfield workers for support. "We believe that the rank and file, now that they have the opportunity will vote the way they strike, shoulder to shoulder, united in a tremendous vote for themselves at last."¹¹

The Central Labor Union's prediction was accurate; Republicans swept every office by wide margins. Campbell came in a distant third, receiving just 2,152 votes, while the Republican winner garnered 22,762, and his Democratic challenger 17,565. But the loss failed to deter Campbell from politics or union

 9. *Ibid.*, September 24, 1935, p. 6. The September 13 Springfield Union reported the signatures and addresses of residents who signed Campbell's nomination papers. Using the 1934 city directory, it was possible to determine the place of employment and occupation of the party candidates, and of many who signed nomination papers.

10. Springfield Union, October 8, 1935, p. 4; October 24, 1935, p. 1; November 1, 1935, p. 14; and November 4, 1935, p. 1.

11. *Ibid.*, October 1, p. 4 and October 7, 1935, p. 3.

organizing. In 1937, he played a pivotal role in the successful mayoral campaign of one of Springfield's leading industrialists, Democrat Roger Putnam. Putnam had embraced the United Electrical and Radio Workers in 1936 as a needed voice for labor, when Campbell mounted an organizing campaign at Putnam's Package Machinery Corporation. After the election, Campbell turned his energy and attention to organizing union locals in Springfield.¹²

In 1936, Westinghouse Local 202 was an integral part of a burgeoning plant-by-plant movement directed by the United Electrical and Radio Workers to organize every Westinghouse and General Electric plant in the United States. Both corporations discouraged union organization through the selective use of paternalistic labor relations and periodic purges of union activists from their plants. By 1936, locals had been formed through grassroots initiatives at GE electrical transformer plants in Schenectady, New York, and Lynn and Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and at Westinghouse radio and appliance plants in Springfield, Massachusetts, and Buffalo, New York. In early 1936, the United Electrical and Radio Workers claimed to represent 15,000 workers nationally, out of the 300,000 workers in the electrical, radio, and home appliance industry. By 1939, the union claimed to represent workers in plants producing eighty percent of the United States electrical goods. The electrical industry was now characterized by the rapid growth of production workers, from 164,000 in 1933 to 306,000 in 1937, an 86 percent gain. Part of this job and union growth came in Springfield.¹³

In April of 1936, Campbell was informed by the union's national president, James Carey, that efforts were to begin in earnest to organize at Bosch. A first step was to be regular distribution of the union newspaper, the *People's Press*, at plant gates. Bosch workers learned that their Westinghouse counterparts received pay increases each month between May and October of 1936. Local 202's contract called for pay adjustments based on company profits, and the workers received a one percent increase for every \$60,000 a month the company made over a base figure

12. Springfield Union, November 6, 1935, p. 1.

13. Ronald Schatz, American Electrical Workers: Work, Struggles, Aspirations, 1930-1950, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1977. The figures are from Jules Backman, The Economics of the Electrical Manufacturing Industry (New York, 1962), p. 328.

of \$600,000. With the economy beginning to improve, workers saw wage gains of between nine and thirteen percent each month between May and October of 1936.¹⁴

These pay gains opened workers' eyes, since most had not received raises for years. Average annual manufacturing earnings in Massachusetts dropped sharply during the first years of the Great Depression, plummeting forty-five percent between September of 1929 and September of 1930. Although Springfield's skilled metalworkers tended to have higher wages, their income dropped as well. A study commissioned by the state legislature revealed that even with the city's comparatively high average earnings, as early as 1927 income had fallen below \$1,568, what was needed to maintain a family of four. Bosch workers felt pinched as they contemplated signing union cards.¹⁵

By the fall of 1936, fifty-two percent of the Bosch workers had signed membership cards, and on October 12, union organizers announced that an election was to be held on October 16, for officers of the new Bosch United Electrical and Radio Workers Local 206. On October 15, in a direct challenge to the union, management terminated fourteen-year employee Leo Goulet, a toolroom group leader, and Viola Theriaque, an assembler, both of whom were running for union offices. Goulet was fired for allegedly allowing workers to smoke on the job, while Theriaque was let go because of a "lack of work." In spite of, or possibly because of the terminations, Goulet was elected as vice-president and Theriaque as recording secretary. Facing its first test, the day-old Local 206 now had two officers out on the street. Campbell demanded reinstatement of the workers, and threatened to file labor board charges. Four days later, newspapers reported that the union was still seeking a meeting with management to discuss the terminations, and that the union

14. Springfield Republican, October 14, 1936, p. 12; Carey to Campbell, April 24, 1936, in United Electrical and Radio Workers District 2 Archives, in University of Pittsburgh Archives of Industrial Society.

15. Mass. Department of Labor and Industries, Annual Reports for 1938, p. 40, and 1939, p. 43; Special Commission on Stability of Employment, Final Report (Boston, 1933), pp. 61, 105, and 125. By sector, the highest average wages were in printing and publishing, at \$1,850; in foundry and machine shops, at \$1,552; in machine tools and metalworking machinery, at \$1,510; and in electrical machinery, at \$1,422. The lowest were in cotton mills, at \$927; in paper mills, at \$1,014; in knit goods, at \$1,015; and in woolen mills, at \$1,145. The commission was chaired by Stanley King, the president of Amherst College.

had demanded a resolution before Friday, October 23. The deadline came and went, with Local 206 president Robert Shields expressing hope that the issue could be "resolved amicably."¹⁶

The company's efforts at intimidation were not unique. Historian Robert Ziegler recounted an episode in a Madison, Wisconsin, battery factory in 1936, when two union officers were dismissed. There, the members of Federal Union 19587 authorized a work stoppage against the company, unless their leaders were reinstated. Two and a half weeks after the strike vote, Local 19587's leaders returned to work. Peter Friedlander has also documented the intimidation management employed to thwart the United Auto Workers. In one incident, after what workers believed to be a secret organizing meeting, the plant manager walked out onto the shop floor and pointed out each worker who had attended the meeting. Historian Maynard Seider uncovered the creative lengths to which workers went to protect themselves against retaliation; in rural North Adams, Massachusetts, "the workers fashioned their petition [for a pay increase] into a circle, leaving no single name at the top."¹⁷

Bosch workers were cognizant of the organizing going on around them. There was also auspicious economic news in Springfield. The city's machine tool builders had expanded their sales, due in large measure to innovations in the structure and design of the equipment being produced. New materials, especially steel alloys, and new cutting tool designs made "it possible to produce machines doing accurate work at much higher speeds on a greater variety of materials." Van Norman's milling and ball-bearing grinding machines were in heavy demand by car makers, and Pratt and Whitney Machine Tool could not produce its lathes, shapers, and vertical grinders fast enough to keep up with domestic and foreign demand. Firms were working double shifts, and employment in the industry jumped to just over 20,000 in September from 16,000 in January of 1936. These job gains were greater than those of thirteen other industrial cities in the

16. Springfield Republican, October 12, 1936, p. 7 and October 17, 1936, p. 1; and Springfield Daily News, October 24, 1936, p. 4.

17. Robert Ziegler, Madison's Battery Workers (Ithaca, New York, 1977), pp. 25-28; Peter Friedlander, The Emergence of a UAW Local (Pittsburgh, 1975), p. 12; and Maynard Seider, "The CIO in Rural Massachusetts: Sprague Electric and North Adams, 1937-1944," in Historical Journal of Massachusetts, XXII (Winter, 1994): 54.

state. Pay increases and year-end bonuses went to area textile and rubber workers. Package Machinery boosted wages five percent and provided workers with two weeks of paid vacation, as a result of a profitable year. "Plants Run Full Tilt Under Heavy Unfilled Orders" reported a *Springfield Republican* headline. Factories could not get orders out fast enough, city foundries ran at full capacity, and orders for Bosch radios and automotive parts went unfilled.¹⁸

Tool and die makers, mold makers, and all-around machinists, were now in a more advantageous bargaining position than two years earlier, and Bosch workers were in an enviable position to make demands on management. Campbell now questioned whether his "go slow" approach was the proper one, in a letter to union president James Carey. However, Carey applauded Campbell's patience and urged him to persist with efforts to get the Labor Board to rule on recognition.¹⁹ Management still refused to negotiate a first contract, and instead announced that they were going to conduct a poll in mid-December, to determine whether the workers really supported the union.

Shields and Campbell warned management that they considered the poll to be illegal. Superintendent Donald Murray responded by laying off two hundred workers three days before the poll, prompting Local 206 to charge that every dismissed worker was in fact a union supporter. A union representative was dispatched to the Boston office of the New England Labor Board, to protest and call for a representation election supervised by the National Labor Relations Board. Campbell stated that a "walk-out was unavoidable as long as management's anti-union attitude

18. *Springfield Republican*, October 6, 1936, p. 1, October 11, 1936, p. 18, October 14, 1936, p. 5, November 16, 1936, p. 1, November 17, 1936, p. 4, November 18, 1936, p. 11, November 21, 1936, p. 1, November 22, 1936, p. 18a, and November 29, 1936, p. 17. At the end of 1936, the *Springfield Republican* reported that the output of local manufacturers was strong. Gilbert and Barker, Greenfield Tap and Die, and Van Norman were all running at full capacity, and there was increased activity in Holyoke's Fall Alpaca Woolen Mills. See *Springfield Republican*, December 27, 1936, p. 14a.

19. Carey to Campbell, November 24, 1936, in United Electrical and Radio Workers District 2 Archives. The Campbell letter to Carey could not be located, but it appears from Carey's tone that Campbell may have been having some misgivings over not having adopted a more militant strategy to gain recognition. Carey appears to have been subtly pushing Campbell with his "unless pushed" phrase, but he clearly left strategy and tactics in Campbell's hands.

continues." But in a show of moderation, he cautioned against a walk-out until the Labor Board could rule on the legality of the company poll. Finally, on December 17, the company and union discussed outstanding issues at a meeting arranged by the chairman of the New England Labor Board. At this meeting, management agreed to recognize Local 206 and to begin contract negotiations.²⁰

Negotiations remained inconclusive for almost two months, before both sides clashed in mid-February of 1937, when the company decided to hold an election for officers of the company union. The company's continued recognition of both unions, while refusing to conclude contract negotiations, represented a serious challenge to the union's contention that it alone spoke for the workers. But this time, while the union response remained characteristically measured, it was more aggressive. On Monday, February 15, at a prearranged time, workers shut off their machines in a silent protest against management's determination to hold elections. Local president Shields stated "We simply knocked off work at one o'clock and resumed again at 2 o'clock. Everything about the demonstration was orderly. They know our attitude and it now rests with them whether any more labor trouble develops." After exactly fifty-nine minutes, machines were restarted, metal was ground, drilled, turned, and stamped, and magnetos and fuel injection equipment moved through the plant again. Almost immediately, the company recognized Local 206, and bargaining began in earnest. "There is no question that the majority of the employees at the plant are members of the Electrical workers union," Shields asserted. "Any more labor trouble is up to them."²¹

20. Springfield Republican, December 10, 1936, p. 1 and December 12, 1936, p. 5; Springfield Daily News, December 10, 1936, p. 2. In the midst of this turmoil, the union opened a storefront office on Main Street, just a short walk from the plant. Monthly dues were now being collected for the first time, one dollar for men and fifty cents for women. See Springfield Daily News, December 14, 1936, p. 9; See also Campbell to Carey, December 17, 1936, in District 2 Archives. In the same letter, Campbell informed Carey that "there are quite a few plants here who would like to be organized." Campbell added that "if you could get a steel worker organizer or an auto worker organizer, I could help him quite a lot."

21. Springfield Republican, February 17, 1937, p. 1 and February 18, 1937, p. 1. Campbell was quick to point out that events in the plant should not be interpreted as a sit-down strike. See Springfield Daily News, February 16, 1937, p. 2.

Between October of 1936 and February of 1937, Local 206 established itself as the legitimate voice of the workers in the plant. When management fired union leaders, work went on while Campbell and others negotiated. While scores of workers were laid off on the evening of a union recognition vote conducted by the company, union leaders remained low-key, continuing to sign-up new members and publicly stated that they, and not the company union, represented the workers. The local's one measured but militant action, "the fifty-nine minute stand-up," convinced management to discontinue the company union and to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement. To management, the fifty-nine minutes of silence posed a greater threat than the walk-out of a handful of workers in one or two departments. Such unity of action demonstrated that the union leaders did indeed speak for all the workers, and that they could command them when necessary. With orders for radios and magnetos unfilled, and with skilled workers hard to find, management did the logical thing and disbanded the company union and recognized Local 206 as the sole bargaining agent for the plant workers. In 1938, Local 206 was one of two United Electrical and Radio Workers locals in the country to attend the union's national convention with a signed labor agreement.

The union won an initial 2.2 percent raise on each worker's base rate, and Labor Day fittingly became the first paid holiday, in 1937. In 1938, a ten cent base rate increase was obtained, along with "time and a half" for any hours worked in excess of eight during the day, forty for the week, and for all Sunday work. No gains were made in holidays, and the workers still did not receive paid vacations. Nor was there seniority protection. Seniority remained an important issue; in fact, job security for long-term employees had been one of the key organizing issues during the union's formative period. In 1940, grievance and arbitration procedures were in place, seniority rights were spelled out, there were six paid holidays, and a vacation schedule was established. Contract language stipulated that layoffs and recalls were to be based on plant-wide seniority. A job classification book became part of the contract in 1941. Steady wage gains were made as well, with eight and ten cent per hour increases in 1938 and 1939. In five years, base rates were raised from a range of twenty to fifty cents an hour to a new range of sixty cents to one dollar and twenty-one cents. By comparison, only after work stoppages and sit-downs throughout the early

months of 1941 did the United Auto Workers and Ford settle on a ten cent increase, the first for Ford workers in three years.²²

In a 1941 study of collective bargaining, economist Sumner Slichter determined that while seventy percent of contracts negotiated between 1933 and 1939 contained some seniority provisions, eighty-seven percent of metal trades contracts contained such language.²³ Bosch's plant-wide seniority language was significant because in such a large facility, with close to fifty production departments and several hundred job classifications, administering the system became a bureaucratic nightmare. Seniority clauses in other contracts were usually limited to specific departments, making it easier for management to lay off workers. The seniority provisions at Bosch allowed high seniority workers the right to "bump" workers off a job in any other department of the plant if they were being laid off. A chain reaction of "bumps" across the plant could result, causing serious production disruptions. Certain occupations "requiring ability, as may be agreed upon jointly by Management and the Committee of Local 206, as necessary to the efficient operation of the plant" could be exempted from seniority rules. A clause was also put in place calling on the company and union to explore the option of going to a thirty-two hour work-week, if layoffs would reduce the workforce to below two thousand. This plant-wide language and the "bumping" procedures it sanctioned remained contentious in union-management relations for the rest of the local's history.²⁴

The first Local 206 contracts were more elaborate than many other union agreements reached at the time. David Brody characterizes most agreements as "thin affairs, largely codifying

22. Labor Bulletin, September 1963. Nelson Lichtenstein, Labor's War at Home: The CIO and World War II, pp. 46-47. U.S. Steel, General Motors, General Electric, and other corporations similarly increased wages as well.

23. Sumner Slichter, Union Policies and Industrial Management (Washington, D.C., 1941), pp. 105-107. For discussions of the issue of seniority, see Friedlander, The Emergence of a UAW Local, 1936-1939, pp. 72-74; Harris, The Right to Manage, pp. 64-65; Ronald Schatz, The Electrical Workers: A History of Labor at General Electric and Westinghouse, 1923-1960 (Urbana, Illinois, 1983), pp. 105-136.

24. Local 206 Contact (1942), p. 30. In later years, management aggressively sought to limit this language through negotiations and in arbitration cases, arguing that a layoff of twenty-five workers would result in at least one hundred moves across the factory, as each laid off worker exercised his or her rights to bump into other jobs, using their seniority. The domino effect this caused could result in a layoff taking several weeks to complete.

existing conditions and limited to wages, hours, vacations, and weakly drawn grievance and seniority provisions." By contrast, the 1940 Bosch agreement established that all personnel moves were to be based on plant-wide seniority.²⁵ The contract also contained strong maintenance of membership language stipulating that employees "be required as a condition of employment with the Company to maintain their membership in good standing during the life of this Agreement." This was something that the United Automobile Workers only gained with General Motors in 1950. A check-off system was established, with dues being automatically deducted monthly from each worker's pay, and turned over to the Local 206 treasurer. In 1941, the contract required that the company pay the wages of negotiating committee members for work time lost whenever the company requested meetings. Grievance committee members were to be paid during weekly meetings as well. Finally, in 1941 the local gained the right to represent all office workers in the plant, excluding engineers and supervisors.

On the eve of World War II, Local 206 had achieved legitimacy. With the exception of the fifty-nine minute sit-down, this was done at the bargaining table. Maintenance of membership language, company dues check-off, well-defined grievance and arbitration language, and seniority measures elaborating the ways management could move workers in and out of the plant provided workers with parameters in dealing with management. The contract greatly reduced the arbitrary authority of foremen, the catalyst that had sparked worker organizing in the plant.²⁶

Matthew Campbell's union career fits a pattern revealed in other recent studies of industrial union formation in the 1930's and 1940's. Campbell and skilled worker - union activists like him, offered those around them on the shop floor a clear alternative to the petty tyranny of individual foremen. In historian Ronald Schatz's account of organizing in the electrical industry, he cites machine operator Art McCollough, who noted that "The company had the goddamned thing so unequal you know, that a foreman's favorite would be making a hell of a lot more money than somebody else, and this other guy might be

 25. David Brody, Workers in Industrial America (New York, 1980), p. 178; Local 206 Contract (1942), p. 30.

26. Local 206 Contract (1942), pp. 26-33.

doing more... ." In the same study William Winn related how "People bring farm baskets and get good jobs, overtime, privileges. And you couldn't do nothing about it. What could you do?" The theme of unfair treatment is repeatedly invoked in other accounts of early unionization efforts.²⁷

Campbell was assisted in Springfield by several Westinghouse local officers including tool grinder and business agent Wallace Kennedy, and vice president Leonard Wade and negotiating committee member, John O'Connell, both machinists. Two of Bosch's first officers were highly skilled, diemaker Leo Goulet and tool designer Robert Shields. A check on the occupations of ten other Bosch union officers determine that seven held skilled jobs while a similar check for Westinghouse found several tool makers, final inspectors, and set up men were early union officers.²⁸

Schatz found a similar pattern when he examined the occupations of 28 organizers and officers in several UE plants in Erie and East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Lynn, Massachusetts, and Schenectady, New York. The majority were skilled. And among the 28, 23 were Northern immigrants or their children, with 14 of Scottish, Irish or English descent.²⁹ According to historians Steve Babson and John Barnard skilled workers played a dynamic role in the formation of the United Auto Workers. Babson states that "tool and die makers were the cutting edge of auto unionism in Detroit. Production workers provided the critical mass that pushed the UAW forward, but as they stormed the walls of open-shop Detroit, they moved through breaches opened by the tool and dies makers... ." Babson found, as well, that many leaders were Anglo-Gaelic immigrants or their children. Barnard found evidence of the role skilled workers played in his study of the 1939 General Motors tool and diemakers strike. He concludes that it was this strike that "secured the UAW's position in GM, and therefore in the auto industry." Auto plants required two types of

27. Quotes found in Schatz, "American Electrical Workers: Work, Struggles, Aspirations 1930-1950," p. 68. Both workers were machine operators in Pennsylvania Westinghouse plants.

28. Occupations found using Springfield City Directories, 1925-1935.

29. Schatz, "American Electrical Workers," pp. 90-100. Schatz states that these men resembled the 'labor aristocrats' of 19th century England, p. 110. See also Schatz, "Union Pioneers: The Founders of Local Unions at GE and Westinghouse, 1933-1937," Journal of American History, 66 (December, 1979) p. 586-602.

highly skilled workers, those who prepared the tools and dies required to manufacture automobile parts, and those who set up and maintained the thousands of pieces of equipment in an assembly-line paced production plant. When a workers' strike at the Detroit Fischer Body plant in early July escalated to twelve plants and 7,600 workers by July 24, General Motors conceded that preparations to bring out its 1940 models were at a standstill. They attempted to get dies produced at area job shops, but machinists refused to touch the work, forcing GM to negotiate a settlement with union leader Walter Reuther.³⁰

Capable of turning out precision work to exact specifications, these men were rational and systematic in their approach to their work in the factory. The planning and deliberation of their work carried over to their union organizing. It was not out of character for these workers to urge others to produce quality parts, while at the same time leading the fight against the company for union recognition. Springfield's skilled workers related well to organizing campaigns which centered on fair treatment, compensation, and respect for skilled workmanship.³¹

There is some evidence that in the electrical industry, skilled workers maintained a great deal of their craft identity well into the twentieth century, while their counterparts in industries like steel and automobiles saw this dissipate through the introduction of new technologies and automatically paced assembly lines. In plants like Bosch, with its multiple products and exacting machine requirements, tool and die makers, set-up personnel, and maintenance and repair crews were always in demand through the 1960s. These workers moved all over the plant in the course of

30. Steve Babson, Building the Union: Skilled Workers and Anglo-Gaelic Immigrants in the Rise of the UAW (New Brunswick, N.J., 1991), esp. chapters 4 and 5; John Barnard, "Rebirth of the United Automobile Workers: The General Motors Tool and Diemakers' Strike of 1939," Labor History, XXVII (Spring 1986), pp. 165-187.

31. The skill issue is important to consider in analyzing national events that would overtake the United Electrical and Radio Workers union in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Many Bosch and Westinghouse workers who led the opposition to anti-communist attacks on the union were skilled machinists and tool and die makers, while the first officers in Local 206 were all stock handlers, packers, and machine operators. For more on this, see Farrant, "Skill Was Never Enough: American Bosch, Local 206 and the Decline of Metalworking in Springfield, Massachusetts," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1994, esp. chapter 6.

their day, and were able to stay in contact with large numbers of workers when running for union office. After World War II, their bargaining and leadership positions were challenged by developments outside Springfield, as many of the companies became part of larger multi-plant corporations. Connecticut River Valley metalworkers and their unions were enmeshed in a high stakes fight for survival.

In 1948, Bosch was purchased by a New York-based financial holding company which owned other production facilities. By 1950, the holding company reorganized Bosch into the American Bosch-ARMA Corporation, and corporate control and decision-making authority shifted from Springfield to New York City. In 1953, a new production facility was opened in Columbus, Mississippi, and for the first time work was shifted out of Springfield. The move prompted Massachusetts Senator John F. Kennedy to decry the fact that "the American Bosch Co., a permanent fixture in the industrial life in the city of Springfield, is leaving its location in that city for a free plant, free taxes for ten years, and low-wage labor. . . ."32

Whenever contract negotiations took place, management now compared Bosch wages to costs in Europe, South America, and the rapidly industrializing and mostly non-union southern United States, while Local 206 leaders attempted to maintain the prestige and power earned during the wartime production boom. Through the monthly *Bulletin*, members were warned that new technologies and shop reorganization plans would lead to workers running several machine tools simultaneously, and that would play havoc with long-standing job classification and seniority language, as well as alter the way piece-work rates were set. Militant rhetoric was directed against management for expanding in Mississippi, and for a brief period calls were made to establish a community-based coalition to fight the shift of manufacturing jobs out of Springfield. However, drastic changes in the numbers

32. Springfield Morning Union, April 15, 1953, p. 1; Senator John F. Kennedy, "The Economic Problems of New England," Proceedings of the 83rd Congress, First Session, Vol. 99 (May 18, 1953), pp. 5054-5056. Historian Philip Leahy found that in near-by Pittsfield, General Electric's "coordination of a huge network of integrated production facilities significantly reduced the control which craft workers had customarily exerted over their labor, even as they retained the skills which have been depicted as the cornerstone of their power in the workplace and of their status in life." See Philip Leahy, "Skilled Labor and the Rise of the Modern Corporation: The Case of the Electric Industry," Labor History XXVII (Winter, 1985-1986), p. 53.

of employees, caused by changes in the nation's economy, led to unstable union membership. Local 206 membership ranged from a high of over 2,500 in the 1940s and 1950s to a low of about 600 in January of 1961. As a result of these factors, a consistent and unified response to the company was never developed. Instead, union leaders responded to each new crisis as it occurred, while membership dropped and work left the city for the southern states.³³

Historian Nelson Lichtenstein contends that a "system of interclass accommodation" developed in the late 1940s between unions and management, that served to blunt worker power on the shop floor and in the wider political arena. Such power was effectively used on the shop floor during the 1930s and early 1940s by skilled machinists and others intent on maintaining control over the pace and content of their work. Labor agreements provided workers with basic protection from unilateral reprisals by management. Quickie work stoppages and departmental slowdowns escalated among workers, and Lichtenstein estimated that by 1944 one of every two workers in the automobile industry was taking part in some sort of work stoppage. In 1944, a General Motors vice-president reported that most GM strikes were "caused by the refusal of workers to meet production standards."³⁴

The fight over the pace of work took on great urgency in Springfield during the mid-1950s. Because of their high skill levels, the intricate and close tolerance work they performed, and the important role they played in guaranteeing high quality production, Bosch workers had not had their role on the shop floor challenged, but this was to change. The new management

33. *Labor Bulletin*, April 1959, p. 1. In the same article, Perelle is praised for bringing in his management team. The article concluded on an optimistic note: "We [the workers] have proven our worth -- considerations always follow recognition" See *Labor Bulletin*, November 1959, p. 1, and May 1956, p. 3. In 1956, one *Bulletin* writer likened supervisors to "new-born reptiles ready to strike at the opportune moment." See *Labor Bulletin*, May, 1956, p. 3.

34. Quoted in Lichtenstein, "Conflict Over Workers' Control: The Automobile Industry in World War II," in Michael Frisch and Daniel Walkowitz, eds., *Working Class America* (Urbana, Illinois, 1983), p. 295. The workforce Lichtenstein describes as being the most actively involved in shop floor job actions is quite similar to the one found in the Bosch plant. During the 1940s and early 1950s, close to fifty percent of the workforce set up and operated manual machines and could significantly control output by controlling their own pace. Information from Local 206 seniority and occupations lists, UMass Archives.

team that consolidated its authority in the plant during a 1953 corporate reorganization was determined to take control.³⁵ Between 1954 and 1960, Springfield management invested heavily in research and development, purchased automatic machine tools, and instituted inventory and quality control programs in an effort to upgrade the factory and increase production efficiency. High volume, labor intensive production for the automobile industry was relocated to Mississippi, and management rejected every overture the union made to play a positive role on the shop floor. For a time, management still recognized the importance of skilled workers. In 1952, the company newsletter carried photographs of workers in its apprenticeship program and indicated that those workers were essential to the success of the firm. But by the end of the decade, the only training being offered was to management, and most of it centered on how to increase output from fewer front-line workers. A corporate strategy based on increased control over the shop floor was put in place, and the plant's historic reliance on the input of skilled workers came to an end.³⁶

In a 1954 letter to workers, new plant manager Charles Perelle pointed out, "I am relying on all of you to help in every way you can to increase our business and overall efficiency so that we can maintain our competitive position without drastic changes." However, one of Perelle's first decisions was to eliminate the plant's nineteen year-old labor-management committee. It was unclear to the union how that could help to increase overall efficiency.³⁷ The committee met monthly to discuss and resolve

35. During and immediately after the war, the CIO's Philip Murray and the UAW's Walter Reuther attempted to define a role for labor in corporate decision-making, based in part on the shop floor militancy described by Lichtenstein. Murray's Industry Council Plan sought a voice for labor in corporate production, investment, and employment decisions. See Lichtenstein, "Conflict Over Workers' Control," p. 301. By the mid 1950s, the Local 206 labor agreement contained the following language: "The Company reserves and retains complete authority to manage its business and to make all decisions relative thereto, including, but not limited to, the right to schedule the work and working forces, discipline or discharge employees for just cause, promulgate reasonable shop rules, and other inherent management rights not herein specified."

36. "New Training Program Looks Good," in Craftsman (December 1952), pp. 6-7. In 1957, Progress reported on a one day a week training program for supervisors studying calibration, timing, maintenance, and repair of diesel pumps. See "Back to School for AB Staffers," Progress, August 1957, p. 4.

37. Craftsman, XI, no. 2 (August-September, 1954), p. 1.

production-related problems before they escalated into poor work or grievances. The union's president and business agent, along with top managers, were members. The union viewed the elimination of the committee as proof that good labor relations were a thing of the past, and it was said that "If the company wants trouble all they have to do is start. We wonder who will be hurt the most." A *Bulletin* editorial stated:

For nineteen years the American Bosch and the Union have enjoyed good Labor Relations but now they seem to be on the downgrade. Now it seems we can no longer have an honest and effective means of settling common problems through the Labor-Management Committee. Labor-Management meetings have been held monthly where subjects have been discussed and issues settled before they became a major problem. These meetings were beneficial and should be continued.³⁸

To achieve productivity gains and cost reductions, Perelle needed union support and a workforce willing to share their skills to solve problems.³⁹ David Montgomery described the consequences of worker gains in the late 1930s and 1940s in this way:

The power which unionizing workers won on the job at this time was far more significant to them and to their employers than whatever wage gains they won. Shop stewards and committee men and women, backed up (often physically) by the

38. *Labor Bulletin*, January 1955, p. 1.

39. The issue of corporate management's determination to gain greater control on the shop floor after World War II has been the subject of several recent books and articles. An early and pioneering work is Joel Seidman, *American Labor From Defense to Reconversion* (Chicago, 1953). Recent works include Sanford Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions, and the Transformation of Work in American Industry, 1900-1945* (New York, 1985); Steve Jefferys, *Management and Managed: Fifty Years of Crisis at Chrysler* (New York, 1986); Nelson Lichtenstein, "UAW Bargaining Strategy and Shop-floor Conflict," *Industrial Relations*, XXIV (Fall, 1985) and "Auto Worker Militancy and the Structure of Factory Life, 1937-1955," *Journal of American History*, LXVII (1980).

employees in the departments they represented, translated the inextinguishable small-group resistance of workers into open defiance and conscious alternatives to the directives of the management."⁴⁰

Getting control back came at a price for managers and labor in the Bosch plant. The "conscious alternatives to management directives" that Montgomery referred to were often clever ideas to improve a product or machining processes, or the first hand knowledge and experience skilled workers had in setting up machine tools that made the plant run smoothly. Perelle's elimination of a long-standing labor-management committee was a signal to skilled workers and the union that management was no longer interested in their playing a problem-solving role on the shop floor. As workers withdrew their cumulative production wisdom and "clever ideas," they guaranteed Perelle and themselves only a hollow Victory.

40. Montgomery, Workers Control in America, pp. 164-165.