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## **Labor and the State in Worcester: Organization of the Metal Trades, 1937-1971**

**Bruce Cohen**

During the summer of 1951, the United States Senate Subcommittee on Labor and Labor-Management Relations conducted a two-day hearing on the Reed & Prince Manufacturing Company labor dispute. The subcommittee was investigating a long and violent strike that involved a medium-sized, family-owned manufacturer of machine screw products and its employees, most of whom were members of Local 1315 of the United Steelworkers of America. Local 1315 had been certified as the employees' collective bargaining agent, after winning a labor representation election, by a vote of 449 to 304, on July 20, 1950. The conclusions drawn by the subcommittee concerning the causes of the labor dispute were released in a 1952 report. The report's introduction included a chronology to "document what may be a classic illustration of the frustration of a group of employees in a 15-year fight to win collective bargaining rights."<sup>1</sup>

The report showed that for fifteen years Reed & Prince had, in effect, defied both the state and federal arbitration and mediation services as well as the National Labor Relations Board and the federal courts. The company had prevented organization, collective bargaining, and the negotiation of a meaningful contract by two related labor organizations, the Steelworkers Organizing Committee and the United Steelworkers of America. In fact, no

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1. U. S. Senate Subcommittee on Labor and Labor-Management Relations, Reed & Prince Manufacturing Co. Labor Dispute (Washington, D.C., 1952), p. 1.

meaningful labor contract would be reached with Reed & Prince until 1971.<sup>2</sup>

In many ways, Reed & Prince's attitude, tactics, and success in defying both labor and the state for several decades is less an anomaly than the subcommittee thought. The history of attempts to organize the metal trades in Worcester dates back to the early 20th century. During the Machinists' Strike of 1915 and the Molders' Strike of 1919-1920 several Worcester firms, including the Norton Company, Morgan Construction, and the Worcester Branch of the National Metal Trades Association, were accused of engaging in unfair labor practices such as yellow dog contracts, lock-outs, and blacklists. In 1915, Norton was found guilty of those charges by the Massachusetts Board of Conciliation and Arbitration.<sup>3</sup> None of these firms were directly involved in the Molders' Strike of 1919-1920, but George Jeppson of Norton, Paul Morgan and Jerome George of Morgan Construction, and Harry Stoddard of Wyman-Gordon worked to undermine the strike through such organizations as the National Metal Trades Association and the Thursday Noon Club, as well as through media control. Chester Reed of Reed & Prince and E. Kent Swift of Whitin Machine would both play a major role in open-shop and anti-union activities both during and after the 1930s.<sup>4</sup>

Between 1937 and the start of World War II, organized labor, with the help of the National Labor Relations Board, challenged Worcester's reputation as an open-shop city. The United Steelworkers of America overcame resistance from the National Metal Trades Association and the Worcester County Employers' Association to gain contracts with United States Steel, Worcester Pressed Steel, Worcester Stamped Metal, Wickwire-Spencer, and

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2. Agreement, Reed & Prince Manufacturing Company and United Steelworkers of American, AFL-CIO, April 26, 1971.
3. See Bruce Cohen, "The Worcester Machinists' Strike of 1915," Historical Journal of Massachusetts XVI (Summer, 1988): 154-171.
4. See Bruce Cohen, "Worcester, Open Shop City: The National Metal Trades Association and the Molder's Strike of 1919-1920, pp. 168-198 in K. Fones-Wolf and M. Kaufman, editors, Labor in Massachusetts: Selected Essays (Westfield, 1990), and Doug Reynolds, "Recasting the Politics of Paternalism: The Workers of Whitin Machine, 1930-1955," unpublished paper presented April 29, 1991 at the New England Historical Association conference, Worcester. See the Valley News, October 1, 1952, for coverage of violent strikebreaking at Whitin Machine Works.

Pullman-Standard. Despite these gains, a number of metal trades firms were not organized. The traditional paternalism practiced by Wyman-Gordon, Wright Line, Norton, Morgan Construction, the Jamesbury Corporation, and the Heald Machine Corporation kept those companies open-shop. Reed & Prince, which had been directly involved in the 1919-1920 Molders' Strike, and which was an early supporter of the open-shop, continued a pre-Wagner Act practice of more overt anti-unionism.

The resistance to union organization of the metal trades in Worcester in the 1930s can be seen most clearly in Reed & Prince's refusal to bargain in good faith. Despite the March 19, 1937, signing of an interim agreement with the Steelworkers Organizing Committee, recognizing it as the bargaining agent for approximately 750 employees who had joined the union, negotiations toward a complete agreement broke down as of April 28, when a new attorney, Jay Clark, Jr., was brought in by the company. Clark was instrumental in Reed & Prince hiring Charles F. Gallagher, as "Labor Counsel to Industry." After Clark failed to produce a contract by May 25 as promised, a strike was called by the union on that date.<sup>5</sup>

On June 3, the company finally sent a completed contract to the union organizer, Martin J. Walsh, but this contract included language and conditions that the union had rejected. Reed & Prince attempted to break the strike between May 23 and June 14, through union-busting tactics instigated by Gallagher. By June 10, a back-to-work movement was also started by the firm, led by a local attorney, Charles Ward Johnson, the brother of Theodore Johnson, the company's paymaster. After the signatures of the majority of the employees were collected on a back-to-work petition, it was attached to the June 3, 1937 contract, with the words "the employees of the Company" substituted for "The Union."<sup>6</sup>

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5. In the Matter of Reed & Prince Manufacturing Company and Steel Workers Organizing Committee of the CIO, case No. C-601 (1939) 12 National Labor Relations Board 97. National Labor Relations Board v Reed & Prince Manufacturing Company (1941) 118 F (2d) 874. Clark and Gallagher had initially been employed by Worcester Pressed Steel.

6. *Ibid*; see also Labor News and Worcester Telegram, March to July, 1937. For similar negotiating tactics at Worcester Pressed Steel, see Worcester Telegram, April 1 to 3, 1937.

Reed & Prince reopened on July 14, with the help of a state court preliminary injunction which prohibited all strike activity, including picketing. When picketing continued, on July 15 police officers arrested seven persons, including four employees, three of whom were union officers. Subsequent to this breaking of the strike, the Steelworkers Organizing Committee (CIO) filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board, against Reed & Prince.<sup>7</sup>

The regional director issued a complaint on November 17, 1937, charging that the company had committed unfair labor practices by refusing to bargain, interfering, restraining and coercing its employees and formation and domination of a company union. On May 15, 1939, the Board found that the company had committed the acts charged, and ordered it to cease and desist from such practices. The Board sought enforcement of its order and on April 2, 1941, the First Circuit Court of Appeals entered its decree enforcing the order. On July 2, 1941, the Supreme Court denied certiorari. [However,] the Reed & Prince local by this time had long since disappeared.)<sup>8</sup>

Although the local was gone, having exhausted the alternatives, the company was forced to sign an agreement with the international union (Steelworkers Organizing Committee), on October 3, 1941. However, according to the report, "the contract was substandard, the employees were afraid to become active in the union and they were without the benefits of collective bargaining."<sup>9</sup>

In September of 1942, the First Circuit Court of Appeals found the company in civil contempt, for failing to pay back wages to several of the strikers who had been unlawfully discharged in 1937 and who had been offered reinstatement in compliance with the courts decree on April 2, 1941. Yet Reed &

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7. Ibid.

8. Report, Reed & Prince Labor Dispute (1952), p. 2.

9. Ibid.

Prince would successfully move to decertify the union in October of 1944.<sup>10</sup>

Before the end of World War II, however, the Steelworkers Organizing Committee and its successor, the United Steelworkers of America (USWA), had organized all the wire mills in the area. After the war ended, Worcester was drawn into the national steel strikes of 1946 and 1949. While the 1946 strike involved between ten and fifteen thousand workers and lasted for months at Arcade Malleable and Harrington & Richardson, the 1949 strike occurred after the Taft-Hartley Act was passed, partially in response to the national auto, coal, and steel strikes of 1946. In fact there were no national steel strikes in 1947 and 1948, because of two-year contracts which were signed in 1947.<sup>11</sup>

Because American Steel & Wire was a subsidiary of U. S. Steel and Wickwire-Spencer was a subsidiary of Colorado Coal & Iron Company, 5,000 USWA members went out on strike at these firms in 1949, but not at the steel fabricating plants. However, these firms were affected by the "Big Steel" settlement. In July of 1950, while the United Steelworkers of America, the successor to the Steelworkers Organizing Committee, was again winning election as bargaining agent at Reed & Prince, a lengthy strike occurred at Harrington & Richardson. This strike ended in August, with USWA Local 3902 winning significant gains, including a union shop and sickness and disability benefits. During 1950, Crompton & Knowles' workers (USWA Local 3274) gained a new pension plan, and a brief Worcester Pressed Steel strike led to group insurance as well as pay increases for the workers of USWA Local 1513. Other steelworkers gained raises at Thompson Wire, Johnson Steel and Wire, G. F. Wright, Crompton & Knowles, Wickwire-Spencer, and New England Carbon.<sup>12</sup>

Detracting from the USWA victories was the failure of Reed & Prince to substantively negotiate with the union in 1950, despite the efforts of state and federal conciliators. In fact, the frustrated union called a strike on January 2, 1951. The strike dragged on

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10. National Labor Relations Board v Reed & Prince (1941) 118 F (2d) 874; National Labor Relations Board v Reed & Prince (1942) 130 F (2d) 765.

11. See Labor News and Worcester Telegram, 1946-1949.

12. *Ibid.*, 1949-1950.

despite the efforts of local, state, and federal authorities to bring about good-faith bargaining. Eventually, the union filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board and that agency issued a complaint on April 13, 1951, "charging the company with refusal to bargain and with interfering, restraining, and coercing its employees in exercise of their rights." After hearings before a National Labor Relations Board trial examiner (April 30 through May 4, 1951), the examiner found the company guilty as charged. Earlier, on March 1, 1951, the Massachusetts Board of Conciliation and Arbitration found the company responsible for the continuation of the strike.<sup>13</sup>

The firm's continued refusal to bargain on issues such as arbitration, grievance procedure, union shop and/or dues check-off, holidays, vacations, pensions, and insurance, and seniority, contributed to an atmosphere of tension and at times violence. In 1951, Reed & Prince also engaged in a systematic attempt to break the strike along the lines of the 1937 "back-to-work movement." The role of Theodore Johnson, the company paymaster, and his brother, Charles W. Johnson, in orchestrating this movement again was condemned both by the trial examiner and by the National Labor Relations Board in its decision and order of October 16, 1951. In fact, the National Labor Relations Board concluded:

that the company had exhibited bad faith in the bargaining negotiations by (1) the delay in scheduling the first meeting and furnishing data (2) insistence upon the stenotypist (3) unreasonable withholding of acquiescence on trivial matters (4) instituting a wage increase after negotiations had broken down without notice to the union, and (5) handling of the check-off issue.

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13. In the Matter of Reed & Prince Manufacturing Company and United Steelworkers of America Case No 1-CA-865 (1951) 96 National Labor Relations Board 850: Report, Massachusetts Board of Conciliation and Arbitration (Boston, March 1951).

The Board also found that the company had made coercive and threatening statements during the strike, and it ordered the company to cease and desist from these practices.<sup>14</sup>

However the strike continued as the battle turned to the courts. The first attempt by the National Labor Relations Board to gain a petition for contempt against Reed & Prince failed because the Board sought to enforce the 1942 civil contempt decree which was based on the Federal Appeals Court decree of 1941. The First Circuit Court of Appeals found that "the alleged refusal to bargain since July, 1950 was referable to a new certification by the Board and involves a new independent set of circumstances unrelated to the unfair labor practices established by our 1941 (1942) decree."<sup>15</sup>

When the National Labor Relations Board sought to enforce its October 16, 1951 order, it was more successful in convincing the court that Reed & Prince had engaged in bad faith bargaining and was responsible for the 1951 strike.<sup>16</sup> But by the time the court issued its decree, on June 9, 1953, the 1951 strike had taken its toll on the steelworkers. The number of years that were spent in litigation before the National Labor Relations Board and the courts were costly. Indeed, in its June 9, 1953 decision, the First Circuit Court of Appeals declared that the Board had the right "to consider the unsavory labor relations history of an employer."<sup>17</sup> But the National Labor Relations Board did not initiate contempt proceedings in 1951, despite such a recommendation from its General Counsel. Nor were other sanctions, such as injunctive relief, provided as called for by union attorney Samuel Angoff. Instead, the Senate Subcommittee report of 1952 indicated that the Labor-Management Relations (Taft-Hartley) Act should be enforced, because it was the collective bargaining law of the land.

Despite the admitted weaknesses that the majority of the subcommittee found in the Taft-Hartley Act, the report also pressed for quicker enforcement of the law, arguing that delays of

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14. Ibid.

15. National Labor Relations Board v Reed & Prince (1952) 196 F (2d) 755.

16. National Labor Relations Board v Reed & Prince (1953) 205 F (2d) 151.

17. Ibid.



two to three years from the filing of a charge with the National Labor Relations Board to ultimate enforcement of a Board decision were not acceptable. As Senator Wayne Morse argued, a recalcitrant employer could break a union in three years.<sup>18</sup> Thus, as in 1941, the employees were forced in 1954 to accept a substandard contract. Although in 1941 such an agreement was reached between the company and the international union, since "the local had been destroyed,"<sup>19</sup> the second "victory" for the steelworkers was also a pyrrhic one, as USWA Local 1315 was forced to accept a substandard contract in April of 1954. Again, the company had won through default; the exhausted local, after striking for over three years as the wheels of justice ground ever so slowly, found that most of its members had left the company, and it found dues collections to be an impossible task. The substandard contract of 1954, as well as the one of 1941, maintained the open-shop, with no change in wages, hours, and working conditions.<sup>20</sup> Roy Stevens, the field representative for the USWA stated in 1954 that "most members of the Reed & Prince local had found work in other Worcester plants. Many of them are now members of other local unions. Those who couldn't afford to pay dues to the Reed & Prince local still have been carried on membership rolls."<sup>21</sup>

Neither labor nor management was willing to offer an opinion on how many former workers would return to Reed & Prince despite a two week grace period. In fact, only about 400 of Reed & Prince's 800 to 900 former employees were eligible to vote on the agreement. Although 350 former employees were eligible for their former jobs, Alden Reed stated that "less than a dozen" had reapplied during the previous day. Reed remained

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 18. Report, Reed & Prince Labor Dispute (1952), pp. 5-6; Hearing before Subcommittee on Labor and Labor Management Relations, U.S. Senate, Reed & Prince Manufacturing Co. Labor Dispute, 82nd Congress, 1st Session (Washington D.C., 1951), p. 134.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Agreement between Reed & Prince Manufacturing Company and Steelworkers Organizing Committee, Local 1315, October 3, 1941; Agreement, Reed & Prince Manufacturing Company and United Steelworkers of America, CIO, April 26, 1954.

21. Labor News, April 23, 1954.

adamant that he had been in the right: "The only people who benefitted were our competitors. If the police department had been willing to enforce the common law this unfortunate situation would never had developed."<sup>22</sup> Reed was angry that during the 1951 strike, he was unable to gain the police support and injunctive relief that had broken the almost two month-long strike in 1937. Also, the back-to-work movement, which had been orchestrated by Johnson, was not as successful as it had been in 1937, when workers signed individual contracts after returning to their jobs.

Yet Reed and Prince again in 1954 as in 1941 was able to negotiate a substandard contract that promised little beyond pay raises that were tied to economic conditions. While insurance coverage increased, labor and management still paid on a fifty-fifty basis. The substandard contract of 1954 continued the forty-five hour week, the open-shop, lump-sum payments in lieu of paid holidays, limited paid vacations, and no fringe benefits such as life insurance and sick pay. The company also continued to reject seniority, arbitration, and dues check-off. The company also continued to control the grievance procedure.<sup>23</sup>

Obviously, the recalcitrance of Reed & Prince to engage in collective bargaining had been the key finding in the U. S. Senate Subcommittee on Labor and Labor-Management Relations report of 1952:

This report is of significance pointing up how the purposes of a law (NLR Act) can be successfully frustrated for 15 years by a recalcitrant and determined respondent. The inability of a law and its administration to induce complicity is clearly a matter of legislative concern. And it is this fact . . . that is the central problem to which the report addresses itself."<sup>24</sup>

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22. Worcester Telegram, April 20 and 27, 1954.

23. Agreement, April 26, 1954, Labor News April 23, 1954.

24. Report, Reed & Prince Labor Dispute (1952), p. 2.

Ultimately, the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act only magnified the weaknesses already revealed in enforcement of the Wagner Act of 1935. Except for one deviation, Reed & Prince had been able to parry the costs for bad faith bargaining for almost two decades. In 1937, it broke the Steelworkers Organizing Committee attempts at collective bargaining through a combination of state court injunctions and police action, as well as through the use of a professional strike-breaker and an illegal back-to-work movement. It defied the National Labor Relations Board's 1939 findings of unfair labor practices, as well as the enforcement of the National Labor Relations Board's cease-and-desist order which was issued by the First Circuit Court of Appeals on April 2, 1941. Only after the Supreme Court denied certiorari on July 2, 1941, did Reed & Prince enter into a substandard contract with the international union, on October 3, 1941. Reed & Prince continued along much of the same line in its dealings with the USWA from 1941 to 1954.

While there is much evidence that Reed & Prince's defiance followed in the steps of Worcester's notorious open-shop tradition in the metal trades, there is some evidence that this tradition could be found in other firms during the 1950s and 1960s. The steelworkers engaged in prolonged strikes at Dowd Box in 1948 and at Wright Line in 1963. In the case of Dowd Box, a subsequent election was lost by the steelworkers<sup>25</sup> and in the case of Wright Line, the company refused to negotiate with the steelworkers despite their winning an election for recognition on January 13, 1962. The company sought a decertification vote from the National Labor Relations Board, but in April of 1963 the union won the vote decisively (91-55). After additional attempts at negotiation failed, some 160 steelworkers struck Wright Line in May of 1963. The strike continued until November of 1963, but the company broke the strike through a back-to-work movement. Ultimately, in December of 1963, a National Labor Relations Board trial examiner found the USWA guilty of unfair labor

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25. "History of Labor Movement in Worcester," unpublished paper, 1975, p. 5, in the author's possession.

practices, and his decision was upheld by the Board in February of 1964.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the continued appearance of the open-shop tradition in the post-World War II period, most of Worcester's shops were unionized. The question remains as to why the steel industry in Worcester became so volatile in this period. In addition, in the steel industry, after 1960 there were sharp declines in the number of large shops. In 1945, there were ten shops of over 100 workers and thirteen between 500 and 1,000. By 1975, there were only three shops over 1,000 and ten between 500 and 1,000. One author argues that between 1945 and 1975, "many large union shops have either left Worcester, or closed down completely. Also, other large shops have become considerably smaller. These changes have often been associated with the acquiring of locally-owned companies by large corporations, which often proceeded to consolidate several smaller factories in one location."<sup>27</sup> The author documents his case by detailing the closing and consolidation of steel shops in Worcester between 1954 and 1974.) However the reason that most of the sharp decreases occurred was not because the shops were unionized, but because of structural weaknesses in the industry, including obsolescence, foreign competition, and periodic recessions tied to war-and-peace needs. In July of 1955, a brief nationwide United States Steel strike was settled, with the steelworkers gaining wage increases of fifteen cents an hour. The local steelworkers benefitted from the settlement, although confusion had delayed area walkouts.<sup>28</sup>

If strikes occurred in the industry during the mid to late 1950s, they were usually of short duration and resulted in the steelworkers winning wage increases and other benefits. An exception in Worcester was the Crompton and Knowles strike of

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26. USWA, AFL-CIO and Wright Line Division of Barry Wright Corp. Case No 1-CB-865 (1964) 146 National Labor Relations Board 11; Labor News April-December 1963; Worcester Telegram, Dec. 6, 1963. Another long strike that ended unsuccessfully was the one conducted at the Worcester Telegram and Gazette by the ITU between 1957 and 1963; see Albert Southwick The Telegram Story: 1884-1984 (Worcester, 1985).

27. "The Changing Industrial Picture in Worcester, 1945-1975," unpublished paper, 1975, p. 8, in author's possession.

28. Worcester Telegram, July 2 and 3, 1955.

1957 that lasted seventy-one days. However, in 1959 the Landrum-Griffin Act was passed and it probably strongly contributed to the stalling tactics employed by some manufacturers during the 1960s in negotiating with elected labor representatives. Under the provisions of Landrum-Griffin, if no agreement between union and management has been reached after a year, a new election concerning union recognition could be held. The national steel strike of 1959 lasted for four months, although the USWA ultimately claimed a big victory — a thirty month pact that included wage increases of thirty-nine cents an hour, non-contributory insurance, and a \$1,500 lump-sum payment at retirement, in addition to a regular pension.<sup>29</sup> In 1963-1964, there were lengthy strikes at Wright Line, Worcester Stamped Metal, and Wright Steel & Wire. In addition to Wright Line, the USWA faced another difficulty with Wyman-Gordon, Worcester's second-largest employer. After a decade of organizing attempts, Wyman-Gordon was finally unionized in 1969. The company was alleged to have engaged in unfair labor practices during the 1960s.

Prior to each election, the company took repressive steps in order to insure an anti-union vote. Mass meetings were held at which attendance was mandatory for all shop personnel. Anti-union films were shown and the company lobbied against the union at these meetings. Non attendance meant nonpayment for that portion of the worker's day. Letters were sent by the company to the worker's home in an attempt to prey upon the worker's fear of endangering their family security if they supported the union. Their letters implied that their jobs and security were in jeopardy.<sup>30</sup>

When the results of a labor representation election (held on September 29, 1966) was set aside by the National Labor Relations Board on October 19, 1966, after union objections that the names and addresses of employees who were eligible to vote were not

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29. Labor News, January 8, 1960.

30. War Profit and Exploitation in Central Massachusetts Industry, Worcester Action Research on Military Industrial Complex (Worcester, 1970), pp. 9-10.

provided by the employer, the National Labor Relations Board regional director attempted to conduct another election on December 29, 1966. Despite a subpoena, Wyman-Gordon still refused to provide the union with the names and addresses of eligible employees. The National Labor Relations Board turned to the Federal District Court for compliance with the subpoena. Although the National Labor Relations Board won the first round of this legal battle, the company appealed successfully to the First Circuit Court. However, on April 23, 1969, the Supreme Court reversed the Court of Appeals' decision and sent the case back to the District Court with directions to reinstate its judgement.<sup>31</sup> Through the use of dues check-off cards, the Wyman-Gordon workers were quickly unionized by the USWA in 1969.

Although Wyman-Gordon continued to prosper under unionization, strikes occurred at the firm in 1972 and 1974. In general, the steel industry declined in the 1960s and 1970s. The impact was particularly strong in cities such as Worcester, where the metal trades were so important industrially. The impact would also be seen in the decline of the USWA in Worcester, both in terms of membership and clout. The closing down of most of American Steel and Wire, except for the electric cable division, cost several thousand jobs. After Harrington and Richardson's loss of government contracts, contract negotiations were called off as by 1963 the company was operating with a skeleton crew; perhaps a thousand jobs were lost since the boom time of the 1940s and 1950s. In the case of Harrington & Richardson, loss of major military contracts during the Vietnam War was disastrous. Other major firms that suffered severe losses, consolidation, or closing during this period include Leland-Gifford and Crompton and Knowles. A decade earlier, Crompton and Knowles had employed about 1,000 but by the mid-1970s it was down to 400 employees. Leland-Gifford, which had employed about 1,400 in the mid-1950s, was sold to White Consolidated in 1965, and in 1971 it closed and moved to Maine.<sup>32</sup>

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31. National Labor Relations Board v Wyman-Gordon Co., (1969) 394 US 759.

32. "Worcester — the Non Unionized City," (unpublished paper, Clark University, Worcester, 1975), pp. 17-18; "Changing Industrial Picture in Worcester, 1945-1975," p. 8.

The sorry recent history of the steel industry is well-known, but its impact was severe even in a relatively diversified industrial and service city such as Worcester. Matters were not helped by the fact that the labor movement was slow to develop in Worcester because of the city's reputation as an open-shop and anti-union community, particularly in the metal trades. While the machinists and molders failed in the Progressive Era to break this pattern, the Steelworkers Organizing Committee and USWA were more successful after 1937. The state-limited implementation of the Wagner Act, either administratively or judicially, are well worth noting, particularly in the Reed & Prince saga between 1937 and 1954.

As the nation turned more conservative and anti-labor after 1945, labor organization was further impeded by the Taft-Hartley and Landrum-Griffin acts, which put new restrictions on labor organizations. These controls would lead to prolonged and difficult drives for labor recognition, such as occurred at Wright-Line and Wyman-Gordon. Because of political changes, the National Labor Relations Board's role and influence changed with the times. Indeed, after the Taft-Hartley Act was passed over President Truman's veto and after the subsequent passage of the Landrum-Griffin Act, in response to allegations of union corruption, employers became more aggressive. They refused to assist the National Labor Relations Board in conducting labor representation elections, refused to negotiate with elected labor representatives, and they tried to decertify such representatives.

In addition, some Worcester employers relied on the "old boy" anti-union tactics and organizations that so often had been used by Reed & Prince. Julius Kirle, who had represented Reed & Prince in the 1950s represented Wright Line when charges of unfair labor practices against the USWA were brought at a National Labor Relations Board hearing held in October of 1963.<sup>33</sup>

Certainly the process known as deindustrialization played a role in weakening the industry and the USWA, but to understand the power of the employer, one must go back to the 1951 hearing and to the way Senator Wayne Morse and Senator Hubert Humphrey criticized Alden Reed, the treasurer, and Ernest Boyd, the vice-president and chief negotiator of Reed & Prince. It was

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33. Labor News, October 18, 1963.

clear that an anti-union employer could stockpile goods, and if that failed even take financial losses, including losing government contracts, in order to sustain its authority over the workforce.<sup>34</sup>

Senator Morse attacked Boyd's insistence on having a stenographer record the negotiation sessions:

I cannot think of anything that would discourage good-faith collective bargaining more than to think that every word that was being spoken was being taken down as you maneuvered for position, and I think the fact that you did that is one of the best bits of proof of your clear bad faith in collective bargaining.<sup>35</sup>

Senator Morse went on to say:

I just think Mr. Counsel it is a disgraceful case. It is . . . one of the worst antilabor relations that I have seen in all my experience in the field of labor relations. It is obvious that you have a group of employers here that have been determined from the beginning to "bust" the union. . . . Would that we were in a situation as we were in the War Labor Board days when the Federal Government really had some jurisdiction to enforce some real collective bargaining."<sup>36</sup>

Senator Morse understood that unless recalcitrant firms such as Reed & Prince were forced to bargain in good faith by means of contempt or injunction proceedings, the whole concept of collective bargaining would fail. He also understood that the Reed & Prince labor dispute was a classic example of that failure — even leading to a long and disastrous strike that the USWA did not want.

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34. Hearing, Reed & Prince Labor Dispute, (1951), pp. 83-87.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 101-102.



When Alden Reed died in 1963 at the age of seventy, very little had changed between labor and management at Reed & Prince. The first standard union contract was not signed until 1971, perhaps because of changes in family relationships, including managerial ones, as well as the desire to bid for government contracts. In any case, Reed & Prince's decline was not reversed. By the mid 1970s, it had only 550 employees, and by the late 1980s, when the USWA local was decertified, there were only thirty-five unionized employees.<sup>37</sup>

In 1985, Bennie DiNardo wrote a provocative article entitled "Quitting Time." He indicated that Worcester's days as an industrial and unionized center were numbered; he pointed out that the number of steelworkers had dropped from a high of 16,000 to 10,000 and that union membership had declined from 26,623 in 1950 to 20,619 in 1983, despite gains in the number of service-sector jobs. He specifically emphasized the anti-union attitude of government and industry, exemplified by President Ronald Reagan's decision to break the (PATCO) strike of the Air-Traffic Controllers (1981), the appointment of anti-union members to the National Labor Relations Board, and the deregulation of a number of industries. DiNardo quoted John F. Sullivan, the former president of the steelworkers local at Wyman-Gordon: "Companies don't just close down, they blame the unions." DiNardo concurred with this author's finding that "Worcester's not so much an anti-union city as a non-union city." In 1950, thirty-one percent of Worcester's employees were unionized, but by 1983 the figure had declined to twenty-two percent, despite an increase in the total number of employees from 85,000 to 93,000 during that time period.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps in the light of the ambivalent relationship between labor and the state that is so evident in the organization of the metal trades by the Steelworkers Organizing Committee and USWA between 1937 and 1971, I should be permitted to amend the statement: "Worcester's not so much an

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37. Interviews with John D. Sullivan, formerly sub-area director, USWA, AFL-CIO, October 23, 1990, and February 5, 1991. Mr. Sullivan permitted the author to access the records (1937-1986) of Local 1315, the Steelworkers Organizing Committee, and USWA.

38. Bennie DiNardo, "Quitting Time," Worcester Magazine, May 15, 1985.

anti-union city as a non-union city, due to circumstances beyond the workers' control."

In light of the staunch employer resistance to collective bargaining even after the passage of the Wagner Act, and the slowness of the National Labor Relations Board and the federal courts in administering and enforcing the law against unfair labor practices before World War II, it is not surprising that Senator Morse wanted another War Labor Board to at least guarantee contractual maintenance-of-membership (union security).<sup>39</sup> In addition, the passage of labor legislation which intentionally weakened the Wagner Act, such as the Taft-Hartley and Landrum-Griffin acts, the process of deindustrialization, and the Reagan administration's tactics all seemed to weaken organized labor to the point that today's membership is down to pre-New Deal levels, and Worcester has become the rule rather than the exception in American labor relations. As Christopher Tomlins concludes, "a counterfeit liberty is the most that American workers and their organizations have been able to gain through the state. Its reality they must create for themselves."<sup>40</sup>

Despite its reputation as an anti-union and open-shop community, from 1937 through 1971 Worcester saw substantial gains made by organized labor in the metal trades. Indeed, these gains were made in the very period that the metal trades manufacturers tightened their holds over the local media, including the *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*. Despite the overt anti-union position of the Stoddard family, which included the breaking of the International Typographical Union strike of 1957-1963,<sup>41</sup> Wyman-Gordon was organized by the USWA (CIO) in 1969, and it remains unionized to this day.<sup>42</sup> Reed & Prince

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39. Hearing, Reed & Prince Labor Dispute (1951), p. 142.

40. For an explanation of the state's ambivalent role in labor relations, see Christopher L. Tomlins, The State and The Unions (Cambridge, 1985), especially chapter 9, "The State & The Unions," pp. 317-328.

41. The Stoddard family was the owner of the Telegram and the Evening Gazette until the late 1980s, when it sold the newspapers to the San Francisco Chronicle. The long ITU strike was over the issue of automation of the printing presses and the subsequent loss of jobs.

42. The Stoddard family owned Wyman Gordon in the period under discussion (1937-1971) and did not relinquish control until the 1980s.

was finally "really" organized in 1971, and Local 1315, USWA (CIO) was not decertified until 1989, when the firm was about to go into Chapter 11 reorganization.

If Worcester and the nation can reindustrialize, there may well be a more optimistic end to labor's organization of the metal trades. However, today across the nation there is a smaller percentage of workers organized, roughly sixteen percent, than at any time since the Great Depression. Unionization will only occur if and when the public realizes that management must be held more accountable for the deindustrialization in industries such as steel and that the state must better serve all its citizens, including its workers. In contrast to Western European nations, the American state has become less supportive of attempts by labor to organize the workforce and to engage in substantive collective bargaining. In American cities such as Worcester, there is less of a role for organized labor to play in defining economic possibilities than there is for management, in part because such concepts as worker's participation and co-determination were initially rejected by business and government after World War II.

One indication that organized labor is being buffeted by recessionary trends occurred in the spring of 1992, in the contract negotiations between Wyman-Gordon and USWA Local 2885. The union was asked to accept major wage and benefit concessions, including substantial pay cuts (three dollars per hour), as well as sharing health insurance costs. After a week of negotiations, a new three-year contract was accepted by the workers on April 6, 1992. It included a \$2.75 per hour pay cut, and an agreement that health benefits would only be free if administered by a local health maintenance organization (Fallon). Given the state of the economy, the employees overwhelmingly voted to accept the contract, and to make those concessions. The members of Local 2885 stated that they were sacrificing economic security for job security.<sup>43</sup>

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43. Worcester Telegram and Gazette, March 30 and April 7, 1992.