

Getting the job done...

20 Years with UPWA

Chicago, 1957



Out of the pages of the past has come a union built to modern specifications, the United Packinghouse Workers of America, AFL-CIO.

Labor's hard and bloody trail from deep in "The Jungle" of early packinghouses winds past the bones of many a shattered union of long ago. Time and again, for sixty-five years, the packinghouse workers formed and reformed their ranks in a never ending battle to win relief from their labors, and to build a better life for themselves and those who were to follow.

Each surge of the tide was broken by the monarchs of the meat trade, as this story tells, until one came forward fit to be the packers' match—the UPWA.

Born October 24, 1937 as the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee of the CIO, and now matured into the United Packinghouse Workers of America, AFL-CIO, this union found the keys to victory where others had failed.

Herein, is told the story.



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UNITED PACKINGHOUSE WORKERS OF AMERICA (AFL - CIO)



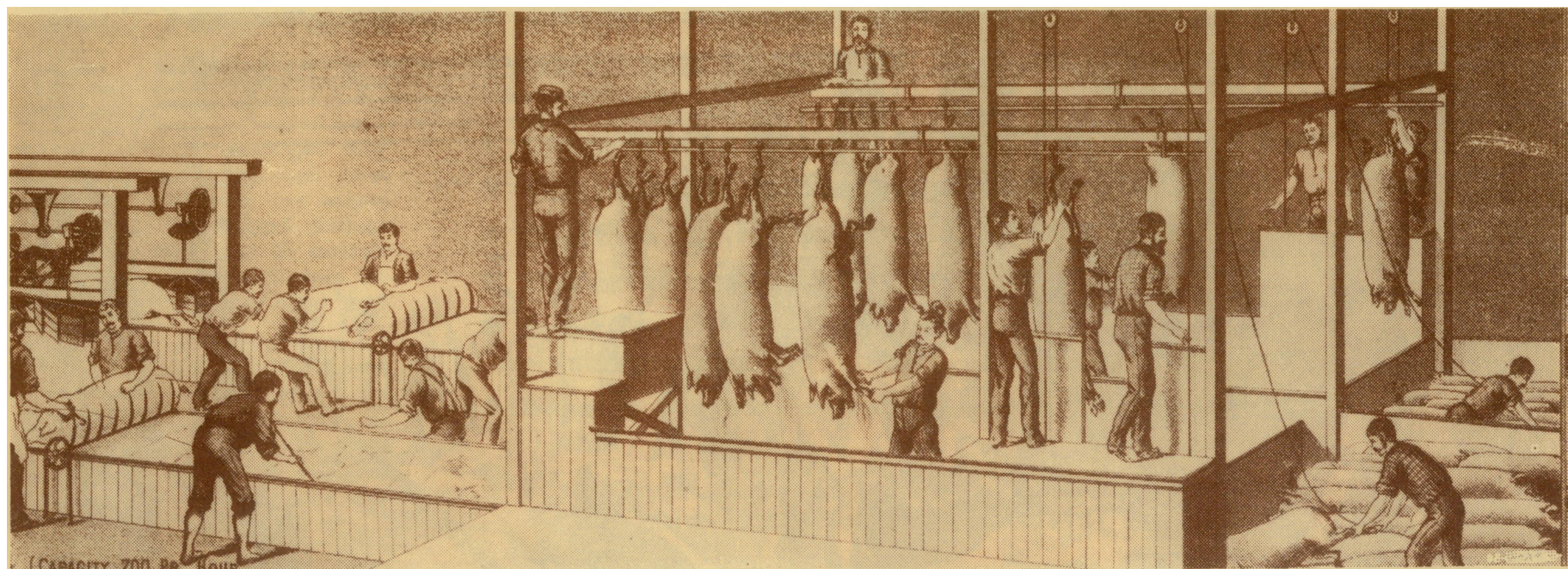
WHEN workers in the packinghouses of the 1880's sought to organize, they turned to the Knights of Labor.

Left: The artist called this, "Cooking room, showing how meat is prepared for packing."

Right: "A cellar view—barreling the meats."

Below: "Killing benches Nos. 3 and 4."

Photos courtesy of Chicago Historical Society.



THE LONG STRUGGLE BEGINS

It is not easy to find in the history books how packinghouse workers worked and lived in those days before the Civil War when Cincinnati was the "Porkopolis" of the nation. Nor were students then gathering wage and hour data for us about those immigrant Irish and German slaughterhouse workers who had built Chicago into the meat packing center of the world by the turn of the century in 1900.

We do know that slaughterhouse work was considered a good paying job in the Cincinnati of 1850. It was an eight hour day with a work day from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Butchers could make nearly \$20 a week during the winter months when cold weather made it possible to chill and "put down" salt and smoked pork. That was big money in those days.

But, in the growing metropolis of Chicago it was to be quite another story. Into Chicago, destined by geography to become the meat packing capital of the world, came Swift, Armour and scores of other hard fisted businessmen on the make. Cincinnati with its relatively good wages and eight hour day was soon undercut by Chicago where the 10 hour day was standard and the first "geographical wage differential" made its appearance. We know that even in 1886 most unskilled workers made 25 cents an hour—perhaps less than \$13.00 a week.

The industry in Chicago grew at a fantastic rate—from 2,129 production workers in 1869 to 22,000 in 1886—but there was no accompanying improvement in wages and working conditions. On the other hand, the newly organized Armour & Company was averaging a yearly profit of 42 per cent on its invested capital between 1869 and 1873.

Skilled workers made several attempts to organize only to meet defeat time after time.

In 1869 the butchers had an organization and won a working agreement

of sorts, but wage cuts during the "hard times" of 1873 could not be headed off even though the butchers struck. They were beaten down. The butchers tried to resist more wage cuts in 1877—again without success.

It was a period of general conflict between capital and labor the country over. Newspapers were hysterical. The Chicago Tribune advised home owners to feed strychnine to unemployed "tramps" asking for handouts. Another paper suggested that the authorities throw hand grenades at strikers to teach them a lesson.

Underground Unions

Labor unions "went underground" in the face of the fierce repression, often taking the form of singing societies and fraternal orders.

In November, 1879, the Butchers and Packing House Men's Protective Union and Benevolent Society made its appearance. A three day strike won a 25-cents per day increase.

The union began to spread to other cities where packinghouses were fast making their appearance along the Missouri River—Kansas City, St. Joseph, St. Louis, Omaha. Soon this union, too, was broken in an ill-fated strike for a closed shop.

Seven years later the packinghouse workers regrouped for a new offensive. It was 1886, a historic year for the American labor movement. The Knights of Labor were sweeping the country

with a brand new idea of organizing all skilled workmen, whatever their craft, into a single organization. Packing-towns in city after city contributed to the swelling membership of the Knights. There was a widespread feeling that 1886 was to be the year of labor's great advance.

The Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions, forerunner of the present AFL, called for a nationwide strike demonstration on May 1, 1886, to demand universal recognition of the eight hour day.

On that day 380,000 workmen walked off their jobs. Among them were the packinghouse butchers of Chicago who answered the call enthusiastically even though their own leaders in the Knights of Labor were cold to the project.

The packers were caught off balance by the strike and hastily reached agreement with rank-and-file spokesmen to cut the work day to eight hours. Membership in the Knights soared among the Chicago butchers.

But, in October of the same year the packers repudiated their agreement. Led by P. D. Armour, they re-scheduled 10 hour days. The workers replied with a strike. Terence Powderly, Master Workman of the Knights, commanded an immediate return to work. With divided leadership the strike collapsed and with it the organization in Chicago.

The Knights held on for a time in outlying cities where strikes were won in Omaha and Kansas City as late as 1892, but in Chicago the packers were quickly pushing out the veteran Irish and German workers who were the strong union men, and replacing them from the new wave of immigrants, Poles, Lithuanians and others from central Europe.

The end came in 1894. The great railroad strike led by Eugene V. Debs aroused the sympathy of packinghouse men who struck in support when troops moved in to protect strikebreakers and move railroad cars in the stockyards. Butchers in Omaha and E. St. Louis joined the walkout. Militia were ordered into Omaha. The strike was crushed and the Knights of Labor wiped out.

Drive Pay Down

In 1886, wages for at least two-thirds of the packinghouse workers were around 25 cents an hour. The minimum was 22 cents. By the final collapse of organized labor in 1896 the pay for common labor had been driven down to 15 cents an hour or less.

In 1884 five cattle splitters handled 800 cattle in a day—about 16 an hour each. By 1896, four splitters were reported getting 1,200 a day—30 per man each hour. The pay of these top-skilled men was cut in the same period from 45 cents to 40 cents an hour—more work, less pay; a refrain familiar today.

Women were making their appearance at the work bench; price—8.5 cents an hour.

In a recent 60-year review of the industry, The National Provisioner, the meat packers' trade magazine, commented guardedly in referring to 1896:

"After the strike the packers found it impossible to rehire all available men; a number of Negroes were taken on for the first time since 1886. In 1896 one packer suggested that the Provisioner keep a record or 'black list' of men discharged for cause from packing plants.

"Local unions were ineffective and were largely ignored by the packers," the magazine observed.

THEY JUST WOULDN'T STAY WHIPPED

The labor movement in meat packing lay in ruins in 1894. Yet, within ten years a new union rose stronger than any of the past.

Only two years after the defeat of 1894 the National Provisioner's columns reported that the new American Federation of Labor had been asked to launch an organizing campaign among Chicago's 30,000 packinghouse workers. The request was made, the magazine reported, by a committee of 20 employees in Swift, Armour, Morris, and other plants. It was to be an industrial union approach with butchers, laborers, teamsters and other craftsmen included in the plans.

The AFL-affiliated Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America was founded shortly after.

Profit from Errors

Profiting from past mistakes, the new union opened its doors to all, laborers as well as the skilled butchers who had been the "Knights of Labor." Newcomer Poles and Bohemians, the Negroes and Slovaks were often elected to office in the new union.

In accord with the decision to organize on the basis of the broadest unity the various craft groups within the plants were unified through Packing Trades Councils.

This policy was powerful medicine. Under its inspiration workers braved spies, discharge and blacklists to enroll in the new union that held such great promise.

By 1899 the union was able to score small successes at the bargaining table. The Provisioner speaks of one of its first victories in grudging admiration:

"One early achievement of the AFL union was to win greater regularity in the hours of work. A strike was threatened in 1899 because of the practice of requiring men to be on hand at a definite hour, but deferring the start of killing operations and then working overtime to complete the day's slaughter. The employees won a definite schedule to begin work at 7:00 a.m. and stop at 5:30 p.m."

In 1903 a Chicago sausage room's wage scale allowed 17.5 cents for labor, 28.5 cents for stuffers, 26 cents for linkers (they were men), and 28 cents for ham boners.

The union felt ready for its test in mid-1904. It was to be the first truly national strike in the history of the industry. The union ranks then numbered 75,000.

Through their new found unity, the packinghouse workers were successfully imposing working rules on a thoroughly reluctant group of bosses—and this without benefit of contracts or the union security clauses and legally enforced collective bargaining rights of modern day unions.

One packer wrote in bitter tones:

"The domination of the packing plants by the union has become unbearable. The proprietor of an establishment has 40 stewards to deal with and nothing that fails to suit them may be done. In consequence the packer may not run his own plant; it is run by the stewards. Discipline has grown lax and the men do not attend to their work as they should."

Emerging as a theoretician of the class struggle, he continued:

"It is doubtful if a union of unskilled workers can be maintained. There is nothing to hold the men together for their places can be easily filled by new

workers. More than 60 per cent of the butcher workmen's organization are unskilled. Their wages naturally are regulated by supply and demand and ought not to be regulated arbitrarily by a joint trade agreement."

The packers offered to deal only for the skilled men and rejected all demands made on behalf of the unskilled.

But the butchers and other craftsmen fought for the principle of solidarity of all workers, and 50,000 men walked out in Chicago, Kansas City, Omaha, St. Joseph, E. St. Louis, Sioux City, St. Paul and other points.

The strike issue was a union demand for a 20-cent minimum wage for labor—a 2.5-cent raise for the unskilled.

The packers acted at once on the theory that "their places can be easily filled by new workers." Even when helped by police and state militia, the packers met with only fair success. After six weeks a compromise was reached providing a board of three arbitrators to decide questions of wages and working conditions. Strikers were to be returned to work as quickly as possible.

However, a conviction that the pack-

ers were blacklisting some strikers led immediately to a second strike; but by this time many workers found their funds and strike spirit were exhausted. Early in September the battle was called off in unconditional surrender.

Returning strikers found themselves in an "open shop." Those on the blacklists changed their names and wandered from city to city.

The Jungle Days

The things packinghouse workers had to do to earn their pitiful wages was graphically described by Upton Sinclair in his novel that became a world sensation, "The Jungle." A hint may also be found in an official report by a federally-appointed inspection committee in 1906.

Commented the investigators:

"The floor where the hogs were dressed was not well lighted and the man who split the carcasses used a miner's lamp on his cap to accomplish his purpose."

It was to be the year 1916 before the packinghouse workers received a pay increase—just 2.5 cents an hour. On the other hand, a government report revealed that the four largest packers had totaled up a handsome \$57,000,000 between 1912-14.

In 1915-17 their profits totaled \$140,000,000, a fantastic figure.



BY 1909 things had brightened up a bit around the packinghouse. Women prepare pigs feet at the Libby McNeill & Libby plant, Chicago.
Photo U. S. Dept. of Agriculture

1919 -- A NEW IDEA IN UNIONISM

In April 1917 the basic labor rate in the Chicago packinghouses was 25 cents an hour. At the same time the cost of living had been skyrocketing since the war began in Europe in 1914. Cartoons lambasting the high cost of living, nicknamed the HCL, were a steady theme in newspapers. There were "food riots" in New York City's East Side.

It was little wonder that workers by the thousands signed application cards when the Chicago Federation of Labor decided to organize the stockyard area. Throngs poured into the city parks around the yards to hear of the program of the Stockyards Labor Council. The speaking was in many languages by strong voiced orators who were their own public address systems.

Within the SLC were all the craft unions ranging from the railway carmen to the butchers unions. It had a unified policy and a single staff of organizers. This was the next thing to industrial unionism—an almost revolutionary doctrine to the craft unions of the time—but made to order for organizing the great mass production industries.

The response was tremendous. Soon the drive reached out to Kansas City, Omaha, St. Joseph and many other packing centers with great success. Under the pressure of localized strikes the new union won limited recognition from employers. It began to settle grievances and improve working rules.

Under threat of a national strike, and at the insistence of President Wilson that there be no interruption of war-time meat production, the packers agreed to accept a government appointed arbitrator to settle all labor disputes.

In April, 1918 the arbitrator, Judge Samuel Alschuler, ordered:

- An eight hour day.
- Double time for Sunday and holidays.
- The ninth and tenth hours to be paid at time and one-fourth; after the tenth hour the penalty was time and one-half.
- Hourly wages raised 3.5 cents and 4.5 cents, the larger amount going to those earning under 30 cents an hour.
- Wage rates to be the same for

women doing the same class of work.

- Guarantee of 40 hours work or pay each week.
- Employees not to be discharged for union membership or union activity outside the plant.
- The principle of seniority.
- Employers to provide proper dressing rooms and lunch rooms.

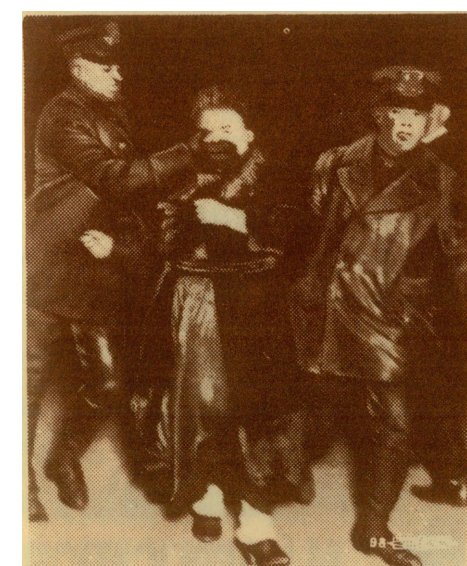
In Chicago, unionists accepted the award at a tremendous Easter Morning mass meeting attended by 40,000 workers.

But, unfortunately, group rivalries began to undermine the SLC almost before it could consolidate this major gain.

One year after the Alschuler ruling the organization showed visible signs of disintegration. The Amalgamated Meat Cutters withdrew from the Stockyards Labor Council to set up its own packing trades council known as "District 9." This step wrenched the loyalties of thousands of workers. Bitter wrangles and factional battles broke into the open.

The disunity disease spread. Some

unions in the mechanical trades withdrew to form their council, too. Other unions remained completely unaffiliated. Among them were all-Negro organizations, the by-products of the 1919 Chicago race riot and the hostility of many white workers.



WOMEN did their share on the picket lines of 1921. The caption on this old newspaper photo said: "Women were the leaders of the strike mobs and fought with the policemen, throwing red pepper and causing more trouble than men."

Acme photo

THE GREAT STRIKE OF 1921



rickers Attend Huge Chicago Mass Meeting— A Mute But Eloquent Argument of Growing Strength of Strike. —Photo by F. P.

ounded conclusion, based on reports of packers, to satisfy their desire for still greater profit, have stooped to withhold from their employees a wage arrangement with the rest of labor massmeetings held daily by District Council No. 9

AN OLD and yellowed newspaper clipping from an unknown labor paper of the time yields a dramatic picture of the 1921 strike.

Into this seething pot of conflict the employers soon added another ingredient—their own private label company organizations.

These were not membership organizations, but plant “government” boards composed of equal numbers of management spokesmen and employee representatives. Although employee representatives were chosen by balloting, candidates were groomed by the management. Even should a rebel win election he could be checkmated by the management which had equal voice and vote. For a clincher the veto power was held by the chairman, always a top flight management representative and often the plant superintendent himself.

Meanwhile, meetings of legitimate unions turned into brawls. Rank and file loyalty to the openly quarreling organizations evaporated steadily.

Judge Alschuler continued to bring out rulings favorable to the workers and it appeared on the surface that the luxury of disunity could be easily afforded. From his 25 cent minimum ruling of 1917 Alschuler's orders had progressively raised wages until they reached 53 cents in December, 1920.

With the peak of the winter hog season safely past in February, 1921, the packers notified the Secretary of Labor that since the war was over, so was their agreement to abide by Alschuler's awards.

One week later the big packers announced wage cuts of 12 to 15 per cent. No overtime would be paid until after 10 hours a day or 54 hours a week, they said.

Insist on Pay Cut

At the end of a hurried conference called by the Secretary of Labor the packers declared that the wage cut would stand. However, they said they would put off action on cutting overtime pay for six months. Six months would carry them through the slow season when there would be layoffs and short hours anyway.

In the middle of summer they asked Alschuler to approve a five cent cut in hourly wages. He declined the request. The packers waited.

In November they were ready. Armour, Swift, Wilson and Cudahy placed the problem before their conference boards. Not too surprisingly, they voted to cut wages ten per cent.

The Amalgamated Meat Cutters responded with a strike on December 5, 1921. Although many thousands answered the strike call, the packers soon recruited strikebreakers.

In Chicago the months of dissension caused that main center to collapse first. In Kansas and Minnesota the militia were called out by the state authorities. Injunctions, police and jails combined with hunger and cold to weaken the strike dangerously.

The leaders of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters called off the strike in the hopes, they said, of saving some of the pieces. There were no pieces to be saved in the bitterness of disappointment, defeat and disillusion.

The Amalgamated was driven back to the meat markets while the packers carried through a series of “adjustments.”

In 1925 the U. S. Department of Labor reported that the average hourly rate for all workers in the industry had declined to 49.7 cents an hour. Only four years before the minimum for unskilled labor had been 53 cents.

The failure of the 1921 strike was hailed by the packers and the press as

a popular repudiation of dictatorial labor leaders. They pointed to their conference boards as the perfect examples of industrial democracy destined to become the pattern of the future.

Company Unions Flourish

There was more than a little justification for the last part of the claim. Company unionism spread rapidly throughout the country to infect many other industries. The conference board dominated workers in meat packing until broken during the late 1930's under the twin attack of the CIO and the Wagner Act.

Its face can still be recognized in several Swift & Co. plants where the National Brotherhood of Packinghouse Workers stands in direct line of descent from those Swift Assemblies that voted to take a ten per cent cut in November, 1921.

This sketch of the UPWA's history was prepared to celebrate the 20th anniversary of its founding under the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee of the CIO on October 24, 1937,

Sources include: “Early Unionism”, by Joseph Novak, Jr.; “The National Provisioner”; a manuscript by Arthur Kampfert and the records of the UPWA. The author asks forgiveness from those individuals and local unions whose exploits did not find their way into this, much too short, narrative.

The front cover includes a print published in “Harper's Weekly” of October 28, 1882—courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society.

Text by Leslie Orear; design by Leo Tanenbaum.



UPWA'S FIRST, FAINT HEARTBEAT

It was spring of 1933. The country was deep in the Depression. Packinghouse workers had suffered their second harsh wage cut since the stock market crash of 1929.

The basic labor rate in Chicago and the East had fallen to 36 cents—lowest since 1919.

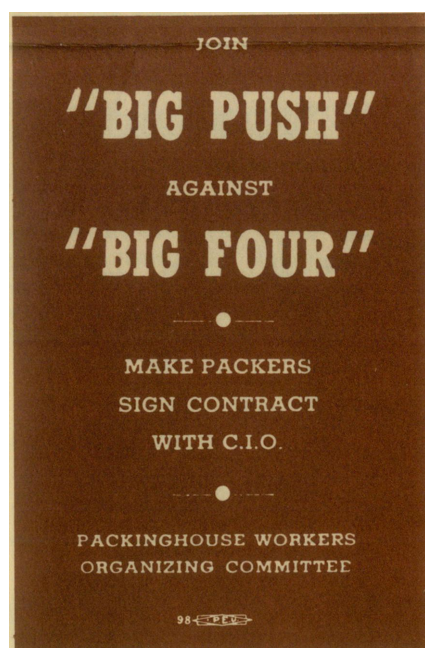
In so-called "river" towns—Kansas City, St. Paul, Omaha and other interior points—rates were even less. In the south and southwest differentials were even worse.

Not a packing plant in the country had escaped attention from supervisory "wrecking crews"—bitter title given the teams of white frocked supervisors sent in to wield the economy axe.

It was a time of whiskey bottle seniority. Immunity from the dreaded lay-off might be bought with a gift to the boss—a tax sometimes exacted also from women workers—although paid in a different currency. The "employee representatives" were well integrated into the system.

The packinghouse workers had touched bottom. For 12 years since the 1921 strike they had been demoralized—without confidence in union leaders or one another. Each worker rolled with the punch as best he could.

The awful lessons of the Depression shattered notions that had grown up during the boom twenties that business and industry could be trusted to give the country wise and public-minded leadership.



MANY veterans of the PWOC days will remember the bright red stickers that were smuggled into the plants and pasted on locker room walls, the posts and stairwells—even on the time clock.

Hundreds of unemployed packinghouse workers who joined the hunger marches or demonstrated at the relief stations in city after city were learning anew the value of organization. Respect for working class leadership sprang up again as thousands responded to the leaders in Unemployed Councils or Workers Alliance groups.

With the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the "New Deal" quickly acted to place a legal footing under the industrial workers' growing impulse to self-help through union organization.

Under Section 7a of the National Industrial Recovery Act the right of workers to self organization and collective bargaining was made public policy. At the same time, the NRA "Blue Eagle" codes resulted in blanket wage increases in a number of industries, meat packing among them.

Under the flag of the Blue Eagle the labor rate in packing's "metropolitan" centers was raised to 42.5 cents, and Section 7a gave encouragement to workers to tackle their shop problems of job security and personal dignity through a rebirth of the labor movement.

The first sprouts of what was to be the new packinghouse union appeared in the summer of 1933. The seed germinated almost simultaneously in Chicago, Austin, Minn. and Cedar Rapids, Iowa and spread, thinly at first, but inevitably, across the country.

Spark at Austin

The Austin seedling was first to bear fruit. Launched by Frank Ellis and others at the Geo. Hormel plant in the militant, one-big-union tradition of the old I.W.W., the Independent Union of All Workers literally sprang into life at a hastily called mass meeting one July night in Sutton Park. That night 600 men and women signed an improvised pledge penciled on a writing tablet. The pledge was a simple declaration that the undersigned would stick together through thick and thin.

The spark which had set off this explosion was the discharge of two hog kill workers for refusing to sign away \$1.20 from their weekly pay as a forced contribution to Hormel's newly created pension plan. In the year 1933 who could afford to put aside \$1.20 toward his old age?

Ellis, who became a UPWA vice-president in 1943, was a living symbol of the packinghouse workers' irreplaceable urge to organize. A door boy in the Armour plant at St. Joseph, Mo., he fought his first scab during the strike of 1904.

The Hormel workers prepared to strike for recognition on the morning of September 23, 1933. A committee of 150 Austin businessmen, fearing that a strike would be "bad for business," met all night long with company and union committees on the eve of the scheduled strike. At their insistence Hormel reluctantly signed a statement recognizing the fledgling union as bargaining agent "in connection with all matters pertaining to the interests and welfare of the members of said union employed by said Geo. A. Hormel & Co."

Waste No Time

The union wasted no time with lengthy negotiations. On Friday, November 10, less than three weeks after the recognition agreement, the Hormel workers declared the company offer unsatisfactory and gave the union officers power to call a strike. The officers were not the hesitant type. Pickets were posted that very night. Nor were the members timid. Strikers swarmed through the plant the next morning ousting foremen and office workers—even Hormel, himself. It was the first of the sit down strikes which later swept like a wave over the country.

Minnesota's Farmer-Labor Party governor, Floyd Olson, withstood Hormel's demand for the National Guard to clear the strikers out of the building. Acting personally as a mediator, Olson prevailed upon Hormel to adjust to the new era in labor relations.

This time it was a packer's turn to "roll with the punch." Hormel agreed to arbitrate the wage issue. The result was a four cent increase for those making under 50 cents an hour. Those above received raises of three and two cents.

That August, in Cedar Rapids, a



SOUP LINES for the unemployed were a trade mark of the Depression. Packinghouse workers touched bottom in the 1930's and began organizing their forces for a comeback. Inspired by the formation of the CIO in 1935, packinghouse workers in many areas begged CIO to give them its help. The Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee was formed October 24, 1937.

group of Wilson workers launched their union. Soon a thousand Wilson workers had been received into membership. The company ignored the union expecting that the enthusiasm and untied solidarity of the workers would burn out quickly. A surprise was coming.

A thousand pickets ringed the plant one April morning. Six days later the company signed a policy statement agreeing to discuss grievances with a union committee and to lay off and rehire by seniority.

As was the case with Cedar Rapids where the workers first organized under the Amalgamated Meat Cutters, so too in Milwaukee. There, in the Swift & Co. plant, the union idea caught a precarious grip on the face of the rock in 1936 and managed to thrive by the wit and pluck of men who learned to walk on eggs, yet work their way forward.

In St. Paul, Armour workers organizing as an independent union were crushed in a hopeless strike.

In Chicago the magic name Stockyards Labor Council reappeared. It was only one of three different groups operating under the surface of the city's restless packintown, but became the most successful.

The response in the G. H. Hammond subsidiary of Swift, and in other plants on the fringe of the big houses was

When hopeful little groups of packinghouse workers began to dream in 1936 and 1937 of organizing their industry, here's the size of the opponent they were taking on:

There were 1,160 meat packing establishments in the United States.

* * *

Four large companies—Armour, Swift, Wilson and Cudahy—controlling combined assets of \$823,000,000, held over half the assets of the entire industry.

* * *

There were 152,000 workers to be organized.

good, but the task of breaking into the main fortresses of the industry was still too difficult. The SLC reluctantly disbanded on recommendation of its leaders who recognized that more resources than those at their command were needed.

They joined the Amalgamated Meat Cutters hoping to blow new life into its weary frame; but the Amalgamated had no confidence in Chicago's packinghouse workers and they in turn had none for the Amalgamated. Organizational activity in the key center of the industry was becalmed, waiting for more favorable winds.

That wind was soon to blow for John L. Lewis was calling on the AFL to open a great drive to organize 27 million American industrial workers, hitherto scorned and ignored by the craft union bureaucrats who dominated the AFL.

Start the CIO

Lewis' creation in 1935 of a Committee for Industrial Organization composed of eight union presidents brought expulsion by the self-centered craft unions.

Propelled by Lewis' vigorous and far sighted leadership, the CIO stormed across the newspaper headlines with its message of industrial organization, trade union democracy, and militant challenge to the power of the mightiest of industries.

On December 16, 1936 representatives of the packinghouse workers at Austin and Cedar Rapids met to discuss the outlook for organizing the rest of the industry. They drew up and signed a document declaring it their purpose, "to seek and obtain affiliation with the Committee for Industrial Organization."

Almost simultaneously a tiny group of 18 workers from various Chicago packinghouses gathered in a tavern "Back of the Yards."

They sent a three-man committee to ask Van A. Bittner, top CIO representative in the Chicago area, for his backing in a new move to organize the city's 30,000 packinghouse workers.

A long awaited wind was blowing a fresh and welcome breeze. Packinghouse workers from coast to coast were sniffing the air in eager excitement.

CIO LENDS A HELPING HAND

It was the packers themselves who had plowed the fields and prepared the soil into which the CIO now cast its seed. The shouting, cursing foreman was standard packinghouse equipment.

The older worker who no longer kept abreast of the speeding conveyor was dumped without ceremony.

There were two basic themes in the early organizing leaflets—job security and the countless injustices that agitated every honest worker. Wage and other benefits were in the picture, of course, but the first need was mutual protection.

“Seniority and grievance procedure,” were the whispered battle cries of the volunteer organizers whose pockets were full of application cards and a stubby pencil—brave souls who quietly circulated at the bench among those they hoped were trustworthy friends. In time those whispers became bold speeches in locker room and street corner meetings.

That is why the packers trumped the wrong card early in March, 1937 when they made the opening move of their counter-attack.

A massive headline in a Chicago newspaper of March 9 announced:

“Packers Raise Wages of \$2,000”

The paper reported a 9-cent increase in the packing industry.

Said the Chicago American, “The action in the packing industry taken before John Lewis’ Committee of Industrial Organization could rid itself of its steel and motors difficulties and seek to organize packing plant workers will affect an estimated 82,000 workers throughout the country, about 30,000 of them here.

“The action, according to stockyard rumors here, was taken to forestall the CIO whose activities in the motor and steel industries have been carefully watched by the packers,” the story observed.

The pay boost was very substantial for those times. It brought the male minimum rate to 62.5 cents in Chicago.

But, the workers took the raise as merely payment on account. The bill they were presenting included additional items—among them seniority and many burning grievances.

In city after city packinghouse workers sought out the CIO. In Kansas City workers at Armour were signing up on Auto Workers cards.

In Birmingham the CIO steel union took them under its wing. In Omaha, where there was no CIO union in sight, eager Armour workers just called themselves CIO, anyhow.

Those were hectic weeks. Scores, sometimes hundreds signed up only to fall apart the next month from lack of leadership and organizational experience.

The CIO itself was taken by surprise at the mushrooming demands for its help, but did not back away from the opportunity and obligation. It authorized the issuance of Local Industrial Union charters to all comers.

Less than eight months after the big packers had played their high card Lewis decided the moment had come for the formation of a central organization just for the packinghouse workers.

The establishment of the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee of the United Packinghouse Workers

of America, or PWOC as it became known, was formally announced on October 24, 1937 at a conference which brought together LIUs and other interested packinghouse groups.

Records of that historic meeting in the auditorium at 205 W. Wacker Drive in Chicago are now lost, but it appears that about 70 LIU charters had been issued—now to be grouped together in the PWOC.

Dues were set at \$1 a month and a small staff of CIO organizers put into the field. Never was there enough money or manpower to meet the need. Countless organizing opportunities went unattended—later harvested by the Amalgamated Meat Cutters.

From the beginning PWOC aimed directly for the heart of the industry—Armour, Swift, Wilson and Cudahy—the operators of vast chains of plants blanketing the nation whose labor policies set the pattern for the whole industry.

With the majors once in hand economic benefits would begin to flow, the PWOC leaders reasoned, and large and small “independents” could then be expected to fall quickly in line.

It was bold strategy to lay siege to the enemy’s main camp—an enemy known to be ruthless and uncompromising in its opposition to unionism.

plant through a 4-day sit-down that began the morning of September 9, 1938. Their strike issue was a \$22.09 wage claim on behalf of six men in the hide cellar. Women workers sent baskets of sandwiches and coffee by ropes up and over the high brick walls that ring the plant to the men who held the fort inside.

A thousand raw unionists struck three Buffalo packers for 64 days in 1937. Six hundred Boston sausage workers won a 10 per cent wage increase in June, 1937. A holiday called by the union provided the needed leverage. Chicago stockhandlers struck for 14 days in November, 1938.

Fargo, So. St. Paul, Ottumwa—name any city on PWOC’s roster of those years. In each there is a record of mass baptism under fire. But nothing was quite in a class with Swift at Sioux City, Iowa.

PWOC had made relatively little headway in the 30 or more plants of the Swift chain in September of 1938.

The 450-employee Sioux City plant, where organization was quite strong, stood practically alone. Swift saw a chance to chop off a head. The Sioux City workers asked the company to meet their committee to talk grievances. Repeated refusals led to a stoppage on all three killing floors.

Swift replied with the discharge of all 165 sit-downers. The plant went out and the strike was on. It lasted 123 days. For 59 days the Iowa National Guard patrolled the premises. The Employee Security League, fancy new name for the company union, herded the scabs. Fellow packinghouse workers in the Armour and Cudahy plants came out in a self-declared one-day holiday to support the Swift picket line. Two hundred arrests were made. Thirty-eight strikers were indicted on charges of riot, conspiracy and assorted crimes.

Ultimately the National Labor Relations Board ruled that the company should reinstate 101 of the discharges. That left 64 to be casualties of the battle.

But Swift only thought it had won, and at a heavy cost at that. The Sioux City workers reorganized their ranks and went on to win their collective bargaining rights by a labor board vote of 335 to 128—and Swift was to sign a master agreement later.

UPWA members and their leaders now seek solutions to the complex problems of a new period.

In the past, such problems were solved because:

- UPWA members were self-reliant and ready to go at the sound of the gong;
- UPWA leaders never feared to attempt just a little more than seemed possible;
- UPWA members’ respect for their union had not been undermined by corruption and “business morality”.

So long as UPWA keeps a firm grip on the spirit of its past, a way will always be found to protect and advance its members’ welfare.



WORKERS in the New York and Boston Markets were among the first to see action. It was 1937 when these New York pickets marched in close order past the Swift house.

THE BATTLE BEGINS

While the packers may have lost the trick when they played their 9-cent trump in early 1937, they were by no means out of the game. They held two strong suits and there was always the possibility that the union might make a suicidal blunder. With 50 years of labor history in mind, that was a fair assumption.

For their counter-strategy the packers chose to play a delaying game, waiting for the historic weaknesses of labor—dissension, distrust and dishonesty—to riddle the upstart PWOC as they had so many of its forerunners.

The packers’ cards included a large collection of company unions. These they could use to draw off into harmless channels the workers’ hunger for organization and redress of grievances. Or, there was terror. Terror might take any of a number of forms, subtle or blunt and bloody. Transfer to a particularly heavy or repulsive job (there was no shortage of either) might be one form. Again, it might be pressure on the paycheck through shorter hours, mysteriously declining incentive earnings, an unexplained lay-off, perhaps a missed promotion to a higher paid job.

The ace in the hole was the discharge, a card that fell again and again as the weeks and months dragged on while the packers carefully evaded a showdown.

This long and trying period which

lasted for four years produced no great hero figure towering above all others—no single leader whose name would become a legend among packinghouse workers. Instead, it produced heroes by the hundreds.

What other word but heroic fits the 120 stewards who walked from their lockers to their jobs in the Cudahy, Sioux City plant on the morning of December 31, 1938, each with a whistle tied conspicuously to his work clothes? Each steward blew his whistle promptly at nine that morning. And what name but hero for the Cudahy workers who dropped their tools and turned off the conveyors at the sound until the whistles rang out 50 minutes later?

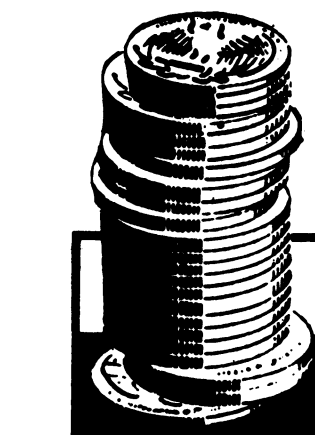
In this same plant Cudahy eventually paid out \$18,685 in back pay to 11 men it had discharged for union activity. It was May, 1941 before the cases finally worked their way through the legal red tape, for the National Labor Relations Board’s order of reinstatement was at first ignored by the company. A threatened contempt of court citation was needed to bring results.

Of the 11, Otto Boyd, Preston Daniels, Alex Gongliewski and Michael Misliska, had been fired at Christmas time, 1937—40 months previously.

But, willingness to risk reprisal for the union cause was not the only mark of the rank-and-file hero. Five hundred Armour workers held the Kansas City



MANY were fired for union activity and those who won reinstatement through the NLRB cashed checks written in big numbers. Columbus Curry, of Cudahy, Omaha, holds his check for \$3,282.



BREAD AND BUTTER IN THE PACKING INDUSTRY

| | 1902 | 1916 | 1917 | 1918 | 1919 | 1920 | 1921 | 1923 | 1929 | 1931 | 1932 | 1933 | 1934 | 1936 | 1937 | 1941 | 1942 | 1946 | 1947 | 1948 | 1950 | 1951 | 1952 | 1953 | 1954 | 1955 | 1956 | 1957 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | 15c | 22½c | 27½c | 44c | 50c | 53c | 37½c | 42½c | 45c | 40c | 36c | 42½c | 50c | 53½c | 62½c | 72½c | 72½c | 96c | 1.02 | 1.15 | 1.26 | 1.41 | 1.45 | 1.50 | 1.55 | 1.64 | 1.79 | 1.91 |



JOHN L. LEWIS waved a greeting to a vast throng of 16,000 packinghouse workers and their supporters who jammed the Chicago Coliseum on the memorable night of July 16, 1939. PWOC had called a national conference to open a finish fight with Armour for a contract. Lewis came to pledge CIO's support and Bishop Bernard J. Sheil gave his blessing to PWOC's struggle for social justice.

SWEET FRUIT OF VICTORY

The gains scored in that first Armour agreement may seem puny to us today, but to the rank-and-file men and women whose three years of courage and sacrifice had kept the PWOC alive and fighting, the new-won conditions were a vindication of their early visions.

Seniority Governs

A seniority system to govern layoff, rehiring, and promotion, and the elimination of the "60-day break" were certainly most valuable gains. It had been company policy to break the continuous service record of employees if off the payroll for more than 60 days, whatever the cause. If rehired, they were new employees with no claim to vacation or other long-term employee privileges. The elimination of the "break" was a victory of immense proportions. In the same way, agreement to notify laid off employees when their turn came for re-employment marked a big step in PWOC's civilizing of the packinghouse "jungle." No longer need workers spend carfare and time to wait around employment offices in the vain hope that there might be "something doing."

Workers congratulated themselves about the new 3-hour call-in pay. It had been commonplace to report for work on schedule only to be sent home an hour later or perhaps not to start at all.

Bent, Not Broken

It should be noted that there was no check-off of dues, no union security clause of any sort, no wage increase. Neither was there arbitration of unresolved grievances. The company had only bent, not broken.

Negotiating meetings at the various plant cities turned into bicycle races. It took weeks for company and union spokesmen to "travel the circuit," repeating the dreary process at each plant of arguing the points all over again to satisfy the company's objection "on principle" to central negotiations for a chain-wide master agreement.

A master agreement came, however, a year and a half later—the historic date August 8, 1941. It was then the eve of World War II. Under PWOC's pressing, the National Defense Mediation Board told Armour to cut out the nonsense and bargain with PWOC for a national agreement. The product was the first such document in the history of the industry.

Cudahy followed suit in November. Next to sign one contract for its 20 PWOC plants was Swift. It also signed with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters covering that union's six Swift plants.

And, the strategy of breakthrough

speeches to Local 3 in Cedar Rapids, Don King was pounding the tables as he told grievance committees that Armour would never sign a contract. They had signed one in 1903, he said—a mistake they'd never make again.

It was coming time for a showdown. The dam had to be cracked somewhere and Armour was the obvious choice. It was a big enough and tough enough company so that a victory over Armour would carry great weight. Perhaps because of the company's toughness it was also true that Armour workers were tough, and at mid-1939 were by far the best organized of all the nationally operating companies.

Battle Position

PWOC moved its forces into battle position. The union summoned a national conference for July 16, 1939 in Chicago. John L. Lewis announced that he would attend. The news of Lewis' coming electrified the atmosphere. The nation's press focused its glare on Chicago. Mass delegations of PWOC members poured in from outlying centers.

From Cedar Rapids came 157 by special train; 101 from Ottumwa. St. Joseph sent an auto caravan. The union hired the biggest hall it could get—the Chicago Coliseum—and invited all of Chicago's labor movement to come to a mass meeting with Lewis as the speaker.

That night 16,000 roared when Bishop Bernard J. Sheil, national head of the Catholic Youth Organization and a renowned churchman, strode to the platform to shake Lewis' hand and give his blessing to the PWOC's determination to win a signed contract from Armour.

Lewis pledged the support of the whole CIO and damned the packers as only John L. Lewis can.

The Coliseum went wild. Headlines swept the country:

"STRIKE LOOMS AT ARMOUR."

A committee of Chicago aldermen headed by Paul H. Douglas (since become a U. S. Senator) met with top Armour officials. They were joined by Mayor Dan Butler of Omaha who came to add his voice to the plea that Armour negotiate with PWOC.

The company refused. Even mediation was out of the question, the Armour spokesmen said.

Company president R. H. Cabell packed up his bags and went to Europe for a holiday.

Strike preparations went on in earnest. It was apparent that a battle to rival the famous "Little Steel" strike was shaping up around an issue of basic public policy—enforcement of the federal law's requirement that management must bargain in good faith with the chosen representatives of the workers.

President Roosevelt indicated his interest.

A big delegation from 15 Armour plants hurried to Washington to explain the problem to the Secretary of Labor, Miss Frances Perkins. That same day she summoned Armour vice president H. S. Eldred to Washington. He came, but the discussion was inconclusive. It was then August 18th. PWOC leaders had their eyes on the October hog rush, still six weeks off, and kept a steady grip on the reins.

With the coming of mid-September the PWOC delegates returned once more to Washington and Miss Perkins. The hog season was nearly here, they pointed out. This time Miss Perkins sent her wire to Cabell and told him to come in person. He did.

On September 19 Armour caved—not

completely—but enough to signal the beginning of the end. The dam was going out.

Cabell agreed to open up general negotiations over wages and working conditions at each plant represented by PWOC. The company's signature would be affixed to the documents resulting, and agents of the Department of Labor would countersign the company signature.

The first PWOC members to see the Armour handwriting were the Kansas City bargaining committee. It was then February, 1940. PWOC members everywhere could celebrate Washington's Birthday in the knowledge that their own revolution had at last won its decisive battle. By the year's end Armour had put its name on the line at 17 plants and PWOC was tightening its organizational clamp on Swift, Wilson and Cudahy.



AUTOMOBILE caravan from the Armour plant in St. Joseph, Mo. drove to the Chicago meeting with John L. Lewis. Special trains brought 157 Wilson workers from Cedar Rapids and 101 from the Morrell plant, Ottumwa, Ia.

By August, 1941 PWOC had proved itself a potent money getter. A lawsuit brought under the new Wage-Hour law was won. The decision resulted in back pay for overtime hours estimated by the Department of Labor to amount to around \$20 million.

PWOC had gathered the evidence and PWOC members were the witnesses who testified in the government's case against the packers. "Tolerance weeks" disappeared forever from the meat packing industry.

Raises Came

In April, 1941 the packers sought to short circuit PWOC's anticipated wage demand by announcing that they were voluntarily raising wages eight per cent—no union needed! But, PWOC pushed right ahead with its original 20-cent demand and, by August, won five cents in addition to the packers' earlier gift. These raises upped wages 10 cents or more.

PWOC was now in a period of explosive growth. The Swift chain "caught fire." Consolidation in the Armour, Cudahy and Wilson chains moved rapidly ahead. Many "independents" began gravitating to the PWOC's powerful magnet. At least 52 charters were issued in 1942. Growth was most marked on the East Coast. In Canada, too, PWOC was catching hold, particularly in the Toronto area.

But, while PWOC's organizers rolled on to victory after victory at the labor board polls, its negotiators were finding hard going at the bargaining tables.

A 20-cent wage demand had been drawn up in March, 1942. Also on the list were premium pay for night shift work, an increase in weekly guaranteed hours from the 32 of Depression years to 36, and the adjustment of job rate inequities.

War Labor Board

These were war days and the National War Labor Board was the supreme arbiter of labor disputes. There could be no strike move to put power behind union arguments on behalf of workers' needs.

The PWOC argued its case before a panel of the WLB which recommended a 5.5 cent increase retroactive to June 1, the dues check-off, and a clause under which all who signed as members of the union must remain in good standing during the life of the agreement. Other matters were referred back to the parties for more discussion.

The WLB then took its panel's findings under review while the packinghouse workers champed at the delay. Eight months later, on February 9, 1943 the WLB denied the general increase. It was crushing news, but the rest of the demands were practically intact. Among them was an order commanding Wilson & Co.—always the most unreasoning and stubborn donkey in the stable—to sign a master contract. Wilson alone had steadfastly refused to negotiate.

Revise Job Rates

With this WLB Directive began the first step in what was to be one of this union's most important and truly Herculean achievements—the elimination of a maze of geographical wage differentials and creation of a semblance of order and equity in the job rate structure within the industry.

There were "metropolitan" rates, "river" rates, "southwestern" rates, "urban southeast" rates, "southeast rural" rates, "Pacific northwest" rates,

PWOC piled up sensational majorities in NLRB elections. Armour workers at the 31st St. Auxiliary plant in Chicago went PWOC 848 to 148.



STRIKE preparations began in July, 1939 at Armour plants around the country while community leaders in many meat packing centers and the Secretary of Labor, Miss Frances Perkins, put added pressure on the company. Armour finally agreed to negotiate with PWOC and signed for the first time in February, 1940. Here is a noon-hour rally at what came to be known as "CIO Corner" in the heart of the Armour, Chicago plant.

"San Francisco" rates, and "Vernon" rates.

The basic pay scale in Albany, Ga. in 1942 was 22.5 cents below Chicago. Within a single geographical area there were wide variations in pay rates for each skilled and semi-skilled job—and there were hundreds of such jobs.

Various companies paid different rates for the same job. Within its own chain a company invariably had different pay rates for the same job from one plant to another.

Beyond that, there were personal or preferential rates under which certain individuals received more than those alongside them. Women's rates were universally ten cents below men's. It was this bird's nest that PWOC set out to untangle.

While the WLB had ordered the companies to bargain on this question, the packers were completely uncooperative and no progress was made in 1942 beyond a preliminary survey of the problem and the filing of a number of rate inequity grievances which later proved bonanzas.

WRESTLING THE WLB

The year 1943 saw the opening of a remarkable 22-month battle for contract demands which were destined to reshape the packers' habits of a lifetime.

The year also saw the coming of age of this brawny young organization into a full-fledged International Union with the election of its own officers and adoption of a constitution and organizational structure shaped to fit the needs of modern industrial democracy.

The CIO dissolved the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee which had administered the union's affairs through many crises, and UPWA ventured out on its own on October 16, 1943.

The 1943 negotiations had opened in August. By January the War Labor

Board took over. The UPWA presented its case before the board's panel beginning February 16. Arguments continued for six weeks. There were 29 issues in dispute. Presentation of the testimony took two months and 6,000 pages of transcript.

The packers log-jammed the Board and pulled wires to their best ability. With no strike threats to worry them, they swung into manufacture of grievances at high gear, then haggled endlessly over settlements.

Armour was the worst offender. It appeared that the strategy was to put so much pressure on the union by running roughshod over the contract that the leaders would be forced to beg for mercy and drop demands which the packers knew would have far reaching consequences.

Months Drag

The months dragged by without WLB action and the situation in the plants grew more intolerable daily. The union asked the WLB to provide relief through an immediate order for grievance arbitration. The company replied that it was so opposed to the principle of arbitration that it would defy such an order if it were issued. The union appealed to President Roosevelt to seize the Armour chain.

The WLB called Armour's bluff with an interim order instructing it to recognize and deal with union stewards in the departments, and naming Professor Herbert Blumer as arbitrator of grievances. Armour backed down and the board returned to its deliberations on the remainder of the meat packing case.

Again, weeks passed. In January, 1945, word came that the Board was about to take its final vote. UPWA leaders hurried to Washington. So did packer representatives.

Then came a bombshell of atomic proportions. On February 2, Judge Fred Vinson, so-called "czar" of the War Mobilization Office, directed the WLB to withhold further action on the meat packing case.

The membership responded with a postcard and telegram bombardment on Washington. A huge delegation from the main centers poured into Washington to join the officers in a blitz on congressional and administrative offices. Vinson yielded and withdrew his





WILDLY cheering delegates turned the 1943 convention hall into bedlam when CIO dissolved the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee and the United Packinghouse Workers began its career as one of the autonomous unions within the CIO. Delegates then adopted the UPWA constitution, elected officers for the first time and hurried home to get on with the job of building the union.

order. The WLB produced its Directive on February 20, 1945. It was June before all the quibbling was done and the stamp of approval put on the results by Stabilization Director William H. Davis, 22 months after the battle opened.

Many of the familiar paragraphs in today's contracts, so matter-of-fact to us now, trace their birth to the WLB Directive of 1945, and before that to UPWA's Wage Policy Conference of 1943 where they were first conceived. Among other achievements the directive resulted in the following:

A three week vacation after 15 years service.

Increase in the weekly guarantee to 36 hours.

Night premium (five cents).

Cash allowance for work clothes.

Paid clothes changing time.

Knives and other hand tools furnished.

Paid sharpening and tool preparation time.

Overtime and piece work earnings.

Piece work earnings computed on a daily basis.

Arbitration of grievances and time limits in the grievance process.

Reduction of wage differentials affecting no less than 47 Big 4 plants.

The origin of the bracket system of job rate structure, and an average pay boost of two cents per employee.

There was a mountain of back pay applied to the job rate adjustments going back to those job rate grievances filed as a result of the WLB ruling of February, 1943. Back pay for most items began with August 11, 1943. It was then June, 1945.

TENSION marks the faces of UPWA officers and local union leaders as they wait in a Washington hotel room for a call from the War Labor Board. Millions of dollars and the welfare of 150,000 packinghouse workers hung on the WLB decision.

1946--STRIKE, SEIZURE AND 16 CENTS

By late 1945 the packinghouse workers had endured five years of wartime's rising living costs without benefit of a single cent in general wage increase. With the war's closing UPWA moved to repair the damage to its members' living standards which had been caused by the War Labor Board's iron-bound application of the "Little Steel" yardstick to packinghouse wage problems.

Labor's no-strike pledge was no more. UPWA laid before the packers a demand for 25 cents an hour increase. There were two hurdles to pass. The first was the packers, themselves, whose leaders made only a 4-cent offer. The second was the government which still held the lid on wages through the National Wage Stabilization Board's controls.

The packers sat on their 4-cent offer with all the firmness of an immovable object. But, once again, labor's irresistible force began to gather its strength. The packinghouse workers from coast

to coast balloted for a strike by heavy majorities — at Armour, St. Paul, 1,139 to 62.

A 50-member strategy committee chosen by rank and file delegates was put in command.

By January all was in readiness. The tension heightened. The Amalgamated Meat Cutters wired President Truman that they, too, would strike. Together, the two unions could bring almost every packinghouse in the country to a halt.

On January 11, UPWA's elected strategy committee named its strike date — January 16, 1946.

Armour and Swift then moved just a bit — to 7.5 cents. They found no takers. They moved again — to ten cents. "End of the line," they said in effect.

The first national strike in the industry in 25 years began. The Amal-

gamated went out as scheduled. Operations in three of the non-union Swift plants — Kansas City, St. Joseph and St. Louis — were suspended as UPWA supporters walked out in sympathy to throw up their picket lines.

President Truman declared it an emergency and invoked his wartime power of seizure. All struck plants were seized on January 25 for government administration through the Secretary of Agriculture, Clinton Anderson.

But UPWA still had a decision to make. There was no assurance that in its role as the new boss, the government would grant a more adequate wage increase than the packers. A fact finding committee would be appointed, Anderson said, but his message carried no suggestion how long it might take the committee, whether retroactivity would be protected, or that the government would even adopt the committee's recommendations. UPWA leaders remembered their recent experience with government boards — and particularly with Fred Vinson.

The strike committee replied that it would not abandon the most effective strike in the history of the industry without firmer assurance that the members' interests would be protected. That was in the early hours of Sunday morning.

The Amalgamated announced it was instructing its members to return to work Monday. UPWA told its locals to sit tight. Nerves were taut all that day and into the evening.

At eight o'clock a telegram arrived from Anderson. He would place into effect whatever increase the fact finders would find appropriate, it said. The strike was over.

When the raise came, with back pay to January 26, it was 16 cents an hour, the biggest raise the workers in this industry had ever seen.

The packinghouse workers had flexed their muscles with success, and realized with satisfaction that they had pro-





THE wartime no-strike pledge was off. Women workers show brisk determination as they pass by the Wilson general offices in 1946.

duced some brilliant field generals as well.

For an encore, later that same year, the union won a precedent-shattering eight paid holidays and the equally novel principle of company-paid sick leave. More geographical areas were raised to the metropolitan base. A 7.5-cent general increase made a grand climax to contract negotiations in late 1946.

It was far from an easy performance. It took a strike ballot and at least one 28-hour non-stop marathon negotiating session to ring the curtain down on a phenomenal year for the packinghouse workers.

Comes 1948

During the campaign of 1946, UPWA's members were transformed into seasoned fighters from eager but untried recruits in labor's army. Now they understood the mechanics of the picket line and soup kitchen, and had learned to maintain discipline under fire. But, 1948 was to see the tempering of their steel.

In a year when all the signs pointed to a 15-cent round of wage increases among the country's leading industries, UPWA unexpectedly found that its strike partner of two years before had closed out its wage negotiations for a 9-cent raise.

UPWA viewed this as a totally inadequate settlement in view of the

times. Its members realized, too, that their organization's future bargaining power in the industry was in fatal danger if another union were to call the tune—particularly since the Amalgamated represented a relatively small fraction of the employees among the major packers.

The packers were equally determined to make their 9-cent bargain stick. They refused to improve their offer to UPWA. It was to be a trial of strength in a supreme effort to curb the "overly aggressive" CIO union, as UPWA was sometimes described.

On the morning of March 16, 1948, UPWA struck 65 plants of the four big chains, John Morrell & Co., and the Rath Packing Co. Ten weeks later it was evident that the strike was losing ground. Armour and Swift were getting stepped-up production from their non-UPWA plants. Strikers were close to exhaustion.

Reluctant Retreat

Reluctantly the strike committee voted to accept the nine cents offered. Settlement terms were reached protecting the basic contracts with all but Wilson, whose usual stubborn hostility led it to believe it now held the power to sweep UPWA out of its way forever.

Wilson refused continued recognition of the union. There were two weeks more of strike at Wilson's seven plants in a vain effort to force an acceptable strike settlement. It was then decided to send the Wilson workers back while union ranks were relatively intact and carry on the fight by other methods.

The packers had made their nine cents stick, but at a price they found extravagantly high. Particularly chastened was Armour whose president George Eastman admitted that, "... the strike had a tremendously adverse effect on our results." The adverse result amounted to \$25 million, he said.

Eastman continued: "Every hog, every steer, every lamb and calf which we lost because of the strike helped to improve the results of those packers who succeeded in buying them!"

The industry's leaders learned a lasting lesson from UPWA's 1948 demonstration of ready willingness to put on the gloves when provoked and slug it out till the last gong sounds.

However, the union was wounded heavily. The discharge list reached 700 including some of the most active plant leaders. There were deep splits within the organization and serious friction between steadfast strikers and those who had given up the fight earlier. The packers were quick to press the advantage and introduced new and tough-

er work schedules. In the Wilson chain the union was immobilized. To add to its troubles UPWA was thrown on the defensive, for the Amalgamated began raiding operations on a broad scale.

It was forced into NLRB elections at 22 plants, all of which had been involved in the strike. Yet, all were won by top-heavy margins—an instructive lesson both to the companies and to the Amalgamated. The grand total revealed 13,986 votes for UPWA compared to a combined total of 3,919 for the Amalgamated and "no union."

Of the 549 strike discharges in Armour, Swift and Cudahy plants a combination of arbitration awards and direct negotiation brought reinstatement of all except 29, of whom 13 did not wish to return.

The Wilson problem required longer solution since the management had reverted to an almost prehistoric labor policy. It declined to recognize the existence of the union or even to deal with its stewards. But this problem, too was solved in the classic style of the packinghouse workers whose whole

with union stewards throughout the plant—and in effect, throughout the chain.

Wilson's labor policy finally returned to the reality of modern labor relations, in part because of UPWA's dynamic development of one of labor's old but rusty tools, the boycott. A "don't buy Wilson" movement was carried all through CIO whose Industrial Union Councils, even in cities far removed from the battleground, spread UPWA's graphically designed posters and leaflets. Labor papers picked up the story. Wilson's sales department found it increasingly difficult to find buyers for products carrying the company label, even at discounted prices.

The workers applied additional and more direct pressure. At the opening of the 1950 hog season they prepared to strike for the master agreement they were so determined to regain. It was signed in October, 1950. Wilson was now back in the fold and the UPWA membership in stronger bargaining position with the industry than ever.

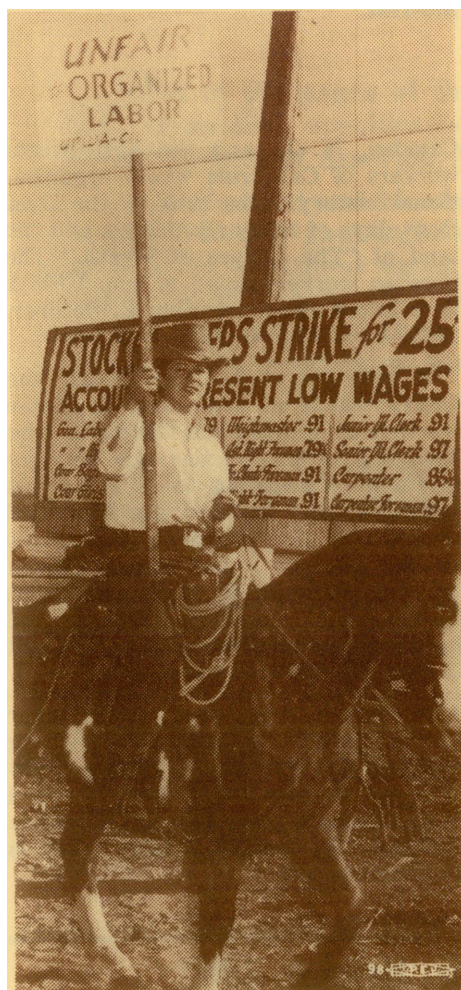


POLICE raided Kansas City strike headquarters in 1948. Heads were beaten unmercifully by the clubs and blackjacks clearly seen in this photo. The city later paid over \$11,000 in damages for the police attack.

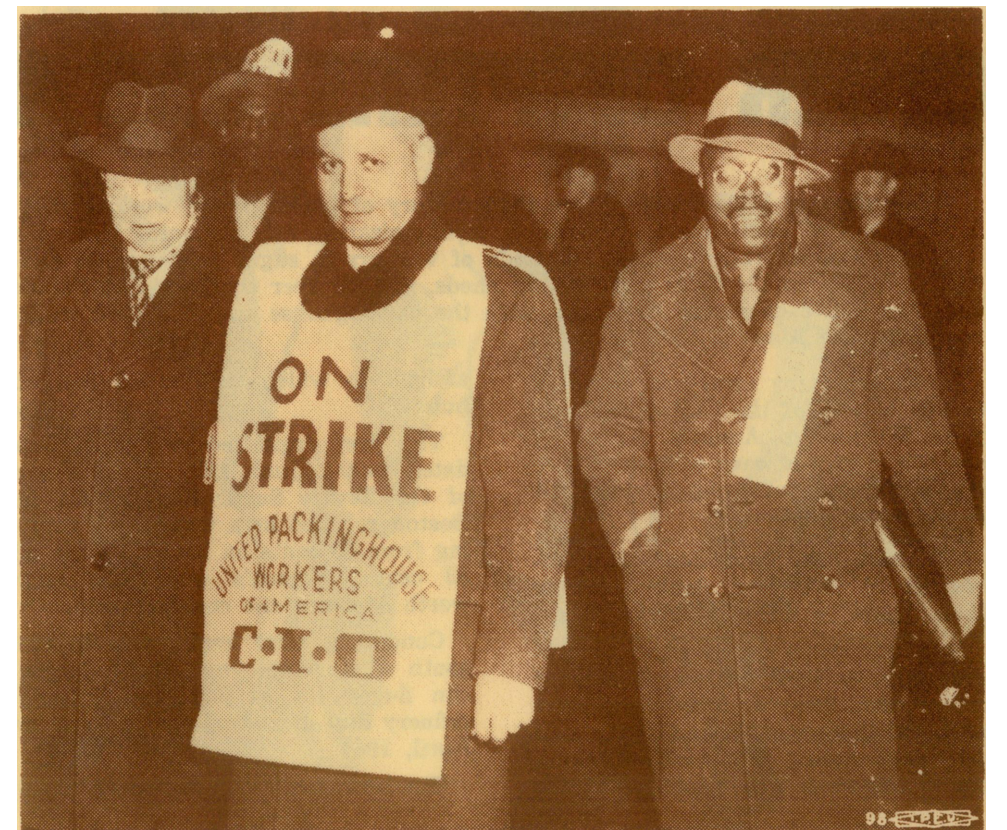
history had been one of resurgent unionism in the face of the heaviest odds.

The Chicago hog kill sat down one day in May, 1949 to demand recognition of its stewards. They were soon escorted off the premises by the city police, but two days later were back at work under an agreement to deal

An interesting footnote to the 1948 strike: Before the year's end UPWA's insistence that nine cents was not enough was completely vindicated. On October 18, wages were increased throughout the industry by another four cents an hour—at UPWA's initiative!



COW GIRL Margie Tavra and partner walk their picket beat during 1946 strike of Los Angeles stockhandlers.



A union president pulls picket duty on the early morning shift. With President Ralph Helstein are Vice President Fred Dowling and an unidentified Swift worker.

THE UNION THAT DID NOT FAIL TO TRY

This is the story of the union that did not fail. It should also be said that this is a story of a union that did not fail to try.

Even before the damage of the 1948 strike had been fully cleared away, UPWA had the engine back on the track—steam up and rolling again.

Our train has pulled some mighty steep grades since those difficult days—and flipped its tail at doubters as we rounded sharp curves which some thought meant sure derailment.

The union train rolls best, all packinghouse workers have learned, when it runs as a double-header. Since 1953 the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and the UPWA have pulled the train together, linked by a joint bargaining pact signed that year.

In 1956 a single committee, composed of top leaders and local union bargainers from the two unions, brought home the biggest package ever. It was filled with 25 separate contract benefits—many of them impossible to place a money value upon.

A potent demonstration of the power in that two-engine combination was the strike that paralyzed Swift & Co.—biggest meat packer of them all. Forty Swift plants and scores of its branches went dead at the stroke of the clock, just one minute after midnight on September 20, 1956.

Twenty-five thousand workers stayed outside Swift's gates for nine days behind the picket, banners of their two unions until the company withdrew objectionable demands it had made. And, when settlement came, Swift had increased its pre-strike wage offer by five cents an hour.

The needs of UPWA members were—and are—great and varied. Its local and national leaders have responded to those needs with creative ideas and boldly resourceful action. The years from 1948 to the present have brought extraordinary advances in all directions. UPWA has kept its place in the very front ranks of the labor movement judged either by the terms of its contracts, or in such vital areas as combatting racial discrimina-

tion, cementing better farm-labor relations, defending civil liberties, stimulating women's activities, and encouraging broad and democratic parti-

Because of UPWA's determination to do what is best—even though the odds may be heavy and the cause unpopular—it was the first union of importance

conference to stimulate work in this field in 1953.

Far ahead of all others, UPWA conducted labor's first venture into closer farmer-labor relations by establishing a regular publication designed for a farm audience in 1945 (*The Meat of It*), with 45,000 circulation. In 1948 its locals began participation in country fairs in order to make face-to-face contact with the farmer on the land. Labor booths at state and county fairs have now become established institutions in many parts of the country.

UPWA's active concern with international affairs dates as far back as 1945 when it created its own Latin-American committee. It published a journal in Spanish for Latin-American trade union leaders and sent its President on a tour of South America. It too, was the first union on the U. S. mainland to undertake comprehensive organizational work in Puerto Rico where its membership has reached 40,000.

As UPWA reaches its 20th birthday, October, 1957, it knows that its 150,000 members, spread from Canada through the United States and all the way to Puerto Rico, are at the threshold of a new era.

Shifting economic currents within the industry are being felt when some of the very buildings within which UPWA was born now close their doors forever. New processors and new products make their appearance with increasing frequency. The swift advance of the new machine, now guided by the electron, threatens to tag as ~~obsolete every familiar job standard~~, proficiency quota, "B"-hour, piece rate and gang line-up which UPWA has so tenaciously fought over for 20 years.

Adjustment to this troubled future must be solved while the atmosphere is darkened by the hazards of restrictive labor legislation.

If UPWA can hold fast to the spirit of its past; and if the question of labor unity in the industry can be solved on a reliable and lasting basis—then the packinghouse workers all over America will be able to say:

"The first hundred years were the hardest."

Camden, N. J., and the agricultural workers of California whose organizational history dates back to the Dust Bowl days of the early thirties and the land of "The Grapes of Wrath." The Camden workers voted to join UPWA in a Labor Board election in October, 1951, by a vote of 2,658 to 1,665.

A referendum in 1954 among the widely scattered fruit and vegetable workers of Arizona and California who belonged to the CIO was also strongly in favor of swinging to UPWA. This group is still battling the Growers' Associations and the Bank of America in 1957 even as it had to do in 1937, but the struggle is now complicated by sweeping technological changes and by the widespread use of imported and ill-paid agricultural workers.

In each of these areas, from sugar and canning in the east to the packing sheds of the west coast, UPWA members and leaders are seeking new and better ways to solve pressing economic problems. In each case labor unity is basic to success.

Some Dreams Do Come True

These are some of the most important additions to UPWA's major packinghouse contracts in the last eight years:

- Severance pay in the event job closes down.
- Guarantee 36 hours of work, or pay, in five days.
- Three weeks vacation for 15 years' service, four weeks for 25.
- Company-paid pensions.
- Company-paid hospital and medical benefits.
- Overtime pay for Saturday and Sunday work.
- Elimination of female wage differential.
- Reduction of geographical wage differentials to the vanishing point.
- General overhaul of rate structure for classified jobs.
- Basic wage increases totalling 71.5 cents with five cents more in cost-of-living escalator raises.

icipation by the membership in the life stream of the union.

UPWA's members have never lost the habit of self-reliance in dealing with the boss—and UPWA's leaders would not have it otherwise. If other unions developed toward a rigid bureaucracy that stifled local initiative, UPWA members chose to settle problems at the local level and on the basis of their own ingenuity before asking for help.

This same trait of independent outlook and determination to act on the basis of conviction has been the fundamental feature of UPWA's character as an organization.

to place a clause in its key contracts barring discrimination against employees or applicants because of race, creed or nationality (1941); to set up an anti-discrimination committee (1944); to conduct a frank and scientific self-survey of race relations practices within the area of its influence (1948); and first to begin a sustained and successful campaign to eliminate segregation in dressing rooms, cafeterias and on the job.

It was UPWA's fresh outlook that led it to pioneer in labor's neglected field of women's activities. Its convention passed a resolution in 1950 naming women's problems as a major programmatic concern of the entire organization, and it called a national

OTHER CHAPTERS ARE YET UNTOLD

The story of UPWA is far more than a story of packinghouse workers only. It is a story of many years of hardship, of organization, and a running battle for a fairer share, as waged by the thousands of workers in sugar refineries, in canneries, dairies, in the fields and packing sheds, and all over the Island of Puerto Rico, who have chosen to link arms with the packinghouse and stockyard workers within the bonds of UPWA.

There are many unwritten chapters to this history of the United Packinghouse Workers of America, AFL-CIO, and the stories of each of these colorful and important groups must still be put down on paper.

All have long and impressive ancestries of their own, dating back in many cases to the mid-thirties.

In 1947, 10,000 sugar refinery workers came to UPWA after a national referendum. They had been organized as Local Industrial Unions of the CIO for many years and were searching for a vigorous and democratic CIO

affiliate in which they could feel at home.

The first organized refinery group dates back to June, 1937. The workers of the Revere Sugar Refining Co. in Boston rebelled at a wage scale ranging from 50 cents an hour to a top of 83 cents. Women's work was only worth 33 cents, the company said.

Conditions were even worse in the south where employees of the American Sugar Co. at the New Orleans refinery first picked up the CIO flag in April, 1941.

The 1957 minimum male rate is \$2.06

in northern refineries and \$1.74 in New Orleans.

One of the sugar workers' finest achievements, so far, has been a guaranteed annual wage in the eastern refineries. The great task of eliminating the north-south geographical wage differential has already begun.

Forty thousand Puerto Rican sugar field and mill workers have called UPWA their union since 1952. They, too, had a long history of organization, but sought the stability and organizational assistance that could come with affiliation to UPWA, the union of the sugar refinery workers on the Mainland.

From the former Food, Tobacco and Allied workers have come two other distinct groups—cannery workers at the huge Campbell Soup Co. plant in

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