

**Preserving the Social Myth?: The United Steelworkers Strike
at the Nashville Corporation in 1947**

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On the basis of this thesis and of
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For "Strange Fruit"

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Introduction

In 1947, the United Steelworkers of America, a Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)-affiliated union, walked out on strike at the Nashville Corporation, or “NashCo,” in Nashville, Tennessee. During the 104-day strike, the Steelworkers were assailed with a flurry of jurisdictional questions surrounding the recently enacted Taft-Hartley Act and National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) proceedings, which coincided with violence, vandalism, coercion and intimidation. Nevertheless, at the root of this dispute lay the issues of worker dependency on management to provide economic security, southern individualism, the CIO’s threat to the corporatist nature of Nashville, and the increasing conservatism of the nation, all of which played determinant roles in the strike. Rather than recognizing these issues as mitigating factors in their southern organization drive, CIO organizers sought a simpler explanation, conceding to the “social myth” that “paternalism—‘the company making everything right’”—was the source of their southern quandaries.¹

Several years before the strike, in 1941, journalist Wilbur J. Cash, a native of North Carolina, published *The Mind of the South*, in which he defined “a fairly definite mental pattern, associated with a fairly definite social pattern.”² Cash argued that a mentality grew out of the mythical Old South where ideas of benevolent paternalism dominated. He contended that tenant farmers, or the “non-slave holding masses of the South,” were pushed into a life of subsistence agriculture by the landowner, who controlled the majority of land.³ Despite living on the margins of society, Cash explained that the tenant farmer identified with the landowner, a member of the elite, along ethnic lines. He argued that southern elites had a “considerable

¹ *Vultee Flash*, 8 July 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 15 Folder, 1875 Box Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, 1947, Southern Labor Archives, Georgia State Univ., Atlanta, Ga. Southern Labor Archives will hereafter be referred to as SLA.

² Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), viii.

community of feeling with [tenant farmers, which] would unconsciously dominate [them] and keep class awareness from penetrating below [their] surface and into the marrow of [their] bones, so long as those below did not rouse to a sense of wrong and begin to strike back.”⁴ Southern paternalism was, in a sense, a double edge sword. While it was often benevolent, when members of the non-elite opted out of the relationship, it became violent in order to maintain the elite’s power. Cash described the southern elite as “wholly dominant, possessing, for practical purposes,...every societal engine, [taking] measures solely with an eye to its own interests—which were not the interests” of the rest of society.⁵

While the twentieth century brought industrialization and economic development to the South, Cash argued that the mythical idea of benevolent paternalism was maintained. He explained that despite this economic transition, it was not a definitive break with the past. Rather, the southern industrial firm remained within the framework of the paternalistic relationship, enabling northern firms to relocate to the South and capitalize on cheap means of production. Economic growth and the acceptance of this false notion of paternalism served to “widen the social gap between the upper class and Factorytown” where tenant farmers had come to reside upon becoming laborers in mill towns and abandoning subsistence agriculture.⁶ With industrialization, the paternalistic bond that existed between the tenant farmer and the landowner was redefined as a relationship between the manufacturer and the industrial worker.

The problem with Cash’s argument and CIO organizers’ myth was that paternalism was not unique to the South. Northern firms used paternalistic ties to maintain control over workers in the 1920s. Therefore, to argue that paternalism was at the root of unions’ difficulties in

³ Ibid., 21.

⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁶ Ibid., 240.

organizing the South was a broad generalization. Moreover, Cash ignored the issue of racism in the South and classified business elites in the same group as rural racist intransigents. Historian Numan Bartley explains in *The New South* that there were various interests in the region fighting among each other for power during the 30s and 40s. Included was the South's reactionary racist tradition, which tended to be agrarian and was often the county courthouse elite. Urbanization and the gradual expansion of industry and commerce created a perception among them that "the 'Old Southern way of life' [had] disintegrated and the future offered little beyond 'catastrophe.'" ⁷ Countering this tradition was the "populist-liberal impulse," reflected in the GI revolts during the late 40s, which challenged county courthouse elites and urban political machines by calling for honest elections, good government, and greater economic security. ⁸ Included in this "impulse" were labor and civil rights insurgencies, which gave rise to southern liberal politicians such as Senator Claude Pepper of Florida and in 1948, Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee. A third force existing in southern society was the "New South," or southern business boosterism, which emerged out of the business and professional, urban and suburban middle class. ⁹ This tradition tended to be conservative concerning such issues as taxes, welfare services, and unionization. However, southern business boosters were also politically and racially moderate, and progressive concerning such issues as education and government efficiency. Overall, Bartley explains that southern business boosterism was committed to economic growth, industrialization, and suburbanization. ¹⁰ Consequently, this force helped create "industry-chasing agencies," commissioned by state governments to promote the relocation of northern firms to the South by offering such incentives as tax breaks, subsidies, and

⁷ Numan Bartley, *The New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1995), 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

an unorganized workforce. It was this tradition that often clashed with the populist-liberal impulse. Southern business boosterism often allied with the county courthouse elite in order to suppress labor insurgencies because unions undermined their doctrine of economic growth by demanding higher wages, which cutting into manufacturers' profits. In the context of Nashville, southern business boosterism typified the Nashville business elite in the late 1940s. Moreover, Cash's idea of paternalism fails to explain what occurred at NashCo in 1947 and 1948. True, Nashville's business elite dominated policy-making in the 30s and 40s as well as various political organs, including City Hall. However, their control did not extend to the degree of industrial paternalism. Rather, historian Robert Spinney explains in "World War II and Nashville, Tennessee: Social Change and Public Sector Expansion" that the Nashville business elite followed the creed of the New South, linking economic growth to social and political stability.¹¹ In other words, as Spinney notes, "prosperity for the central business district transl[at]ed into prosperity for all residents" which could be undermined by labor and civil rights insurgencies.¹²

Despite the fact that Cash's notion of paternalism was somewhat flawed, not all of his observations were invalid. He argued that one factor that contributed to the maintenance of company domination over workers was the permutation of individualism in southern society. Cash maintained that this idea developed out of the conceptualization of a "simple, rustic figure" who emerged out of the frontier in the eighteenth century, and was often characterized as "personalistic and self-asserting."¹³ Subsequently, Cash contended that class-consciousness was rarely an issue in the South because it violated the principle of individualism. Rather, the

¹¹ Robert G. Spinney, "World War II and Nashville, Tennessee, 1938-1951: Social Change and Public Sector Expansion" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1995), 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³ Cash, 31.

industrial laborer seldom had a sense of class awareness because self-sufficiency, narrowly constructed social responsibility, and self-reliance, all of which fell under the rubric of individualism, were underscored and reinforced by close ties with the southern elite. Consequently, this created a rigid class system in southern society which “turned toward straightjacket conformity and [became] increasingly intolerant of dissent.”¹⁴ However, Cash incorrectly generalized the composition of the southern business elite. Given Bartley’s assumptions about the dominant forces in southern society, southern business boosterism reinforced the ideas of individualism in the late 40s. In order to promote economic growth and the relocation of northern firms to the South, the business elite had to ensure a passive workforce that could easily be controlled. Consequently, southern businessmen often promoted individualism by supporting segregated workforces and the division of skilled and unskilled labor.

Fifty years later, journalist John Egerton, in *Speak Now Against the Day*, reaches similar conclusions about the South. Unlike Cash, who traces the well-defined class structure back to the myth of the Old South, Egerton contends that this mentality developed out of the 1930s with the onset of the Depression, when the South lagged behind the nation in terms of economic growth. As Egerton points out, “when America caught the cold, the South got pneumonia and when the nation was really sick, its colonial states below the Mason-Dixon Line were on their deathbed.”¹⁵ Egerton describes the social structure of the South in the 1930s and 40s as archaic, dominated by a southern elite that included “good ‘ole boy” politicians and southern businessmen who resisted changes in society that usurped their power. During the Depression, unionization in the South was virtually nonexistent because the region faced a labor surplus. Subsequently, southern

¹⁴ Ibid., 88.

industrialists capitalized on a cheap labor force. Most workers were not willing to jeopardize their jobs or their basic subsistence for workers' rights. The southern business elite's distaste for unionization and the competition for jobs was so great that it prevented workers from joining a union. Consequently, the inklings of worker solidarity that surfaced in the 1920s were trampled by workers' fears over loss of economic security during an increasingly troubled time.

The economic stagnation in the South during the 1930s was so bad that in 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared the South "the nation's number one economic problem."¹⁶ New Deal legislation in the late 30s attempted to alleviate the economic troubles associated with the Depression. Originally, conservative southern Democrats heartily supported New Deal measures and were an integral part of the Democratic coalition in favor of it. Cash argued that as the economic condition of the southern elite improved, a certain "smugness" returned, and "the economic masters of the country fell gratefully back into their old simple, unanalytical outlook and their habit of considering only their interests and those of their class, slough[ing] off their late dim and painful concern to understand the forces around them."¹⁷

However, Cash's argument is inaccurate. Historian Alan Brinkley, in "The New Deal and the Idea of the State" argues that an economic recession in 1937 renewed fears that the Depression was not over, generating the true rise of the "New Dealers" who took a more regulatory attitude towards the economy. As Brinkley explains, the rhetoric of the "New Dealers" contained "a sharp denunciation of 'economic royalists' [and] to much of the press and the public, what typified the 'New Dealers' was a strong antipathy towards the corporate world

¹⁵ John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1994), 15.

¹⁶ F. Ray Marshall, *Labor in the South* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), 155.

¹⁷ Cash, 385.

and a fervent commitment to using government to punish and tame it.”¹⁸ As the federal government took a more interventionist policy towards the economy in the late 30s, southern businessmen fiercely opposed it because of their reliance on market forces. Consequently, as Cash and Egerton point out, the southern business elite pressured conservative southern Democrats to block liberal legislation. Liberal agenda threatened southern business elites’ foundation of power by giving more clout to such organizations as labor unions, which were repudiated because they challenged the industrialist’s control over the shop floor and cut into his profits by demanding higher wages. In effect, labor unions promised such ideals as equality and social mobility, brought about by higher wages. Relying on these objectives, unions generated solidarity among workers, which despite the predominance of individualism in southern society, also helped create greater class-awareness among employees. This threatened company domination, creating tensions within the southern class structure because unions exposed the worker’s false notion of dependency on the industrialist. As workers began to identify with each other and realize that they could gain economic security through union solidarity, it lessened the manufacturer’s control over the workforce and created greater fluidity within the class structure. As Cash argued, “the union idea inevitably came to grips with the ancient hierarchic feeling and system of the South. That is, they plainly violated....The notion of the captains of the upper orders to tell the people what to do and think—the whole notion of society as divided into such captains on one hand and willing and eager followers on the other.”¹⁹

Despite conservative southern Democrats and businessmen’s growing antipathy towards New Deal legislation, the measures inspired the activism of liberals in the South, such as Myles Horton of the Highlander Folk School and Lucy Randolph Mason of the CIO. However, the

¹⁸ Alan Brinkley, “The New Deal and the Idea of the State.” *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order*, ed. Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), 88.

activism of liberals during the 1930s generated political concerns for conservative southern Democrats, who in the past had monopolized regional politics. Most of the party's leaders descended from the southern business elite and were concerned with fulfilling the interests of their cohorts. Roosevelt's liberal legislation stimulated a questioning of the southern class structure, and many liberals believed that the only way for the region to advance was for its leaders to promote such socially responsive ideas as unionization. Consequently, the Democratic Party became bitterly divided, and would remain so until World War II.

With the onset of World War II, the spotlight of federal policy shifted from domestic politics to foreign policy. The coalition between liberal and conservative southern Democrats that fell apart over New Deal measures resumed in order to combat fascism. Unionization in the South grew dramatically under the New Deal, and while it slowed during the war, it did not come to a grinding halt. Historian Ray Marshall, in *Labor in the South*, argues that labor unions made substantial gains during the war because the War Labor Board (WLB) was a driving force for union organizers. The WLB encouraged unionization despite the fact that its "avowed purpose was to be neutral in labor-management relations."²⁰ While labor unions pledged that they would not strike during the war, the WLB was granted extensive power such as denying a company tax breaks, canceling government contracts, or seizing a plant if the contract in dispute did not meet the approval of the union. Thus, the WLB was often successful in forcing management to adopt a contract that gave greater concessions to a union than it would have received in the WLB's absence. In this respect, the WLB circumvented management's control over workers. Using a "carrot and stick" policy, the WLB created an environment conducive to unionization by using government enforcement to strengthen a union's bargaining power.

¹⁹ Cash, 352.

²⁰ Marshall, 227.

Consequently, while anti-labor sentiment was prevalent during the war, the WLB's extensive power overshadowed the business elite's relationship with workers and allowed labor unions to extend their power in the South.

After the war, New Dealers in the South believed that the liberal voice that came to bear in the 30s and 40s was here to stay. The CIO was riding a tide of union victories from the war, courtesy of the WLB. However, the majority of the South remained unorganized. Consequently, in 1946, CIO leaders devised a plan to organize the region. Known as Operation Dixie, the drive was led by CIO organizing committee director and native southerner, Van Bittner. Historian Barbara Griffith explains in *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Failure of the CIO* that the organizing drive was a failure from the start, and while it continued until 1952, the program was dead by 1947. Griffith argues that the infancy of industry in the South played a particular role in the failure of Operation Dixie because the idea of industrial collectivization had not taken root.²¹ She also argues that organizers mistakenly used tactics successful in the North during the 30s to organize southern workers. This was fruitless because the CIO did not account southern individualism and the region's rigid class structure, which was maintained through "a set of closely interwoven relationships between industrialists, politicians, law enforcement officials, religious leaders and the press—all of which could be mobilized in concert, beyond the levels of co-op commonly found among the same sectors of society in the North."²² Therefore, organizers could not exploit the complaints of workers because they did not understand the "culture of dependence" and ultimately, "the historical legacy of poverty and paternalism all helped weave a blanket of resistance that...suffocated the CIO."²³

²¹ Barbara Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press. 1988). 170.

²² *Ibid.*, xiv.

²³ *Ibid.*, 38.

While optimism among liberals surged following the war, the political climate of the nation changed with the onslaught of the Cold War. There came a sudden shift to the right, a turn towards conservatism which was nowhere more prevalent than in the South. Brinkley explains that “many liberals [became] preoccupied with the international question and with the emerging schism within their ranks over the Soviet Union such that they paid less attention to domestic issues.”²⁴ Furthermore, he argues that improved economic conditions during the war restored Americans’ faith in capitalism, “robbing the ‘regulatory’ reform ideas of the late 1930s of their urgency and gave credence instead to Keynesian ideas of indirect management of the economy.”²⁵ Legislators became “turned off” by regulatory legislation, resulting in a political coalition between Republicans and conservative southern Democrats who feared that Truman’s policies were too “radical” and mere extensions of New Deal measures, already deemed as too “revolutionary” by conservatives. The coalition strengthened the right, overturning liberal measures and introducing conservative legislation, such as Taft-Hartley, which weakened labor unions’ power. One particular institution that was “robbed” of its regulatory authority was the NLRB, a labor board appointed by President Roosevelt. Under the Wagner Act of 1935, the NLRB had been relatively sympathetic to unions, often ruling in their favor. With the implementation of Taft-Hartley, the rising anti-communism of New Deal liberals, and improved economic conditions, the NLRB became more responsive to the political preferences of the Republican-controlled, Eightieth Congress. Subsequently, according to Frank McCulloch and Tim Bornstein, “the NLRB lost its clear identity as an agency committed solely to promoting the organization of unions.”²⁶ Moreover, NLRB General Counsel Robert Denham, a conservative

²⁴ Brinkley, 110.

²⁵ Ibid., 109.

²⁶ Frank McCulloch and Tim Bornstein, *The National Labor Relations Board* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 58.

Republican appointed by Truman to show good faith towards Congress, hailed Taft-Hartley as a “magnificent piece of legislative machinery.” Denham condemned the Wagner Act, which he believed was “designed and administered for the benefit of one branch of our labor-management economy, at the expense of another.”²⁷ Consequently, the NLRB’s increasing conservatism enabled the southern business elite to reestablish control over labor.

As the conservative coalition strengthened in the post-war era, organizations that were seen as “leftist” in their ideology, such as labor unions, developed an aura of suspicion around them in the South. The CIO was a specific organization that came under direct attack in the late 1940s. Because the CIO threatened the southern business elites’ control over workers by demanding higher wages and generating class-consciousness through worker solidarity, its members were often branded as communists or “outsiders.” Historian Michael Honey, in *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights* explains that the CIO did have communist organizers, however, they tended to be a small group and were the most effective in addressing the grievances of southern workers. In addition, historians Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein in “Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement,” argue that when the CIO began organizing the R.J. Reynolds plant in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, organizers who were members of the Communist Party acknowledged the need for social activism and collective responsibility among working-class blacks. The effect was a renewal of black political activism as the deplorable conditions in which blacks worked were acknowledged, resulting in the “transformation of traditional paternalism of Reynolds management into an explicit system of benefits and responsibilities.”²⁸ However, CIO leaders purged its communist organizers in the late 40s and 50s to deflect accusations that its members

²⁷ Ibid.

were involved in “subversive activities.” CIO leaders believed that these accusations would alienate potential members because it branded the CIO as radical, particularly in the South where conservatism was the norm. Paradoxically, the purges contributed to the failure of the southern labor movement because it shifted the union away from its original doctrine of militancy, resulting in the loss of its driving force. As Bartley explains, “the union’s negotiators more and more regularly fought for contracts with welfare, health, and retirement provisions, thus strengthening its position as a source of social benefits for its own membership while subordinating its earlier commitment to the welfare of workers as a class.”²⁹ Consequently, this blurred the distinction between the CIO and its rival, the craft-oriented and job-conscious business union, the American Federation of Labor (AFL).

For southern manufacturers, fear of the CIO was not rooted in the Cold War ethos that communists would march over the world and crush capitalism. Instead, southern businessmen relied on an unorganized, cheap labor force to maximize their profits. This was maintained by workers’ dependency on management to provide for economic security, which was often filled with false promises of high wages and benefits, intimidation, and violence. Unionization challenged this relationship and the social equilibria. For that, the southern business elite harbored a deep resentment towards the CIO. In the simplest terms, southern businessmen feared that unionization would usurp their control over workers because it generated greater class-consciousness, which had long been ignored and repressed in the region.

Historians have largely neglected Nashville as an important facet of labor history in the late 1940s. Unlike Birmingham and Atlanta, Nashville was a second-tier city with relatively few

²⁸ Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, “Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement,” *Journal of American History* 75 (December 1988): 790.

industrial firms. Industries that were present before the late 1940s tended to be craft-oriented, such as textiles and printing. Consequently, the moderate AFL dominated these sectors, but remained relatively weak because they colluded with business to keep the CIO out of Nashville. As Spinney explains, when management was not threatened by the CIO it either tolerated or warred with AFL locals. However, when a company was threatened by CIO affiliates, it warmed considerably to the AFL.³⁰ For CIO organizers in 1947, the NashCo strike embodied anti-labor sentiment. The realities of the Depression where unemployment in Nashville reached 13 percent in 1934, created a sense of dependency and a need for economic security among workers, which enabled the company to maintain control over its workforce.³¹ True, Nashville did not experience the severe conditions of economic stagnation as such cities as Chicago or New York City. However, most blacks and working class whites suffered acutely from the Depression.³² Compounding this was the inadequacy of relief services in the late 30s because of civic elites had an aversion to them. Instead, federal government New Deal programs provided economic relief. However, Spinney notes that Nashville's commercial boosters also used these programs to meet their own needs. Using these programs, Nashville's business elite addressed such social problems as public health and housing. In turn, this helped modernize the city and promoted the relocation of firms to Nashville. One could argue that these programs alleviated worker dependency on the business elite. However, because of the linkages between the business elite and city officials, it is not difficult to see that the implementation of these programs not only solidified workers' dependency on the commercial elite, but ensured social stability in order to provide for economic growth in Nashville. When the Steelworkers arrived at NashCo in January

²⁹ Bartley, 44.

³⁰ Spinney, "Social Change and Public Sector Expansion," 94.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³² *Ibid.*, 12.

1947, worker resentment had been suppressed by fears over loss of economic security and the company's tactics of harassment and intimidation. The Steelworkers threatened company domination at NashCo by demanding higher wages and generating solidarity among workers; reinforced by its commitment to equality and its relative independence from management. As a result, the Steelworkers succeeded in uniting the workers against management and heightened their awareness of the conditions in which they worked, which eventually led to the strike. Furthermore, the Steelworkers temporarily cut the dependent bond between management and workers, generating tensions within the class structure and creating chaos in the eyes of NashCo management because it weakened their power over workers, which was needed to maximize profits.

The events at NashCo in 1947 and 1948 reflect the efforts of the plant's management and the Nashville community to get rid of the Steelworkers. The Taft-Hartley Act and its anti-communist clause are a focal point of this strike. However, the strike was not simply a jurisdictional and legal dispute. In reality, Nashville was a southern community that was unable to accept the CIO because the union produced friction within its corporatist social structure. The violence during the strike on the part of the community reveals the broader implication that the CIO was feared because it generated tensions between classes and therefore needed to be controlled. The violence also reflects workers' heightening frustration with the company and their own social status in the community, made apparent by the Steelworkers' attempts to heighten class awareness. Broadly speaking, as the nation became embroiled in the Cold War, the NashCo strike reflects the increasing conservatism of the nation with the enactment of Taft-Hartley. More importantly, in a regional context, the NashCo strike embodies the issues of, worker dependency, individualism, company domination, the power of the business elite in the

South as well as the insurmountable difficulty the CIO faced in a relatively static and corporatist society at an increasingly conservative time.

Chapter One of this thesis will discuss the dependent and unequal relationship between management and the Machinists at NashCo before the Steelworkers began organizing the plant in 1947. It will focus on how this relationship generated worker resentment, which eventually led to a temporary NLRB victory for the Steelworkers. Chapter Two will tackle the various jurisdictional and bureaucratic disputes the Steelworkers faced during the strike, which the company used as roadblocks to ensure its control over workers while preserving its image as a law-abiding firm. Finally, Chapter Three will address the violence associated with the strike, which became a central issue. Chapter Three exposes how NashCo management, through specific channels, maintained their authority over workers with force and intimidation. Moreover, it will discuss how violence was used by picketers as an outlet for their frustration with the Machinists and the company, and how these acts branded the Steelworkers as terrorists and outsiders, causing them to lose support among members of the community.

Chapter One: “You Boss the Workers, I’ll Boss the Money”

In 1943, southern playwright, Lillian E. Smith, wrote “Two Men and a Bargain.” Smith opens the play writing, “‘once upon a time, down South, a rich white man made a bargain with a poor white,’ telling him, ‘you boss the nigger, I’ll boss the money.’”³³ The events at NashCo before 1947 occurred within a similar framework but in a class context, where the Machinists bossed the workers and NashCo management bossed the money. Anti-union sentiment had a strong legacy in Nashville. Despite pro-union New Deal legislation, unions were weak during the 1930s and 1940s because the city served as a financial and commercial center. Nashville had relatively few industrial firms compared to Memphis and Chattanooga. Locally owned companies that were present tended to be small, making it difficult to mobilize workers against management. The psychological effects of the Depression, induced by high levels of unemployment in Nashville, created an underlying fear over loss of economic security, which took precedent over higher wages and worker solidarity. In turn, this created a sense of dependency among workers for management to provide for economic security, and was reinforced by the close association between business and civic leaders who implemented anti-Depression plans. Unions in Nashville before 1947 tended to be craft locals associated with the AFL. As Bartley notes, the AFL “represented less of a menace to southern tradition. Its acceptance of racially segregated locals, its concerns for the interests of skilled workers, its willingness to cooperate with management, and its moderate political inclinations posed little basic threat to the regional status quo.”³⁴ Because of this, the AFL was more suited for a corporatist environment, and conservative unions in Nashville often opted to maintain good relations with the business community rather than address the concerns of its union members.

³³ Bartley, 4.

³⁴ Ibid., 47.

This amicable relationship guaranteed the business community's ability to control organized labor and promote economic growth while ensuring conservative unions' dominance in Nashville. During World War II, this relationship was maintained and Nashville remained the least organized of Tennessee's major cities.³⁵ Labor and management agreed on incremental wage hikes and benefits to keep employees relatively happy, thwarting any attempts by the militant CIO to organize. CIO organizing was virtually non-existent in Nashville in the early 40s. While there were attempts to organize large plants, such as DuPont, the relationship between conservative unions and the business community kept the CIO out of Nashville. Consequently, the CIO made inroads only at smaller plants, such as the Dortch Stove Works in 1943.

The working arrangement between conservative unions and management was effective in Nashville at the Vultee plant, which was involved in aircraft manufacturing and by 1943, employed 7,000 individuals. However, company intimidation and the union's inability to address workers' concerns escalated to a point that worker resentment surpassed the abilities of management and Machinist leadership to control it. These conditions allowed the militant CIO to capitalize on Vultee workers' discontent, enabling them to make headway into an anti-CIO city. Unlike the Machinists, the Steelworkers weakened management's control over workers because they undermined employees' dependency on the company to provide economic security by generating solidarity, which heightened class awareness among workers.

Vultee Aircraft and the Machinists: 1940-1947

With increased U.S. production of military equipment for the Allies during World War II, many defense firms capitalized on the low costs of production and weak unions by relocating

³⁵ Spinney, "Social Change and Public Sector Expansion," 99.

south of the Mason-Dixon Line. In 1940, Stinson Aviation, of Wayne, Michigan relocated to Nashville, Tennessee, introducing the city to the “glamour industry of the 1940s—aircraft manufacturing.”³⁶ For Stinson officials, relocating to Nashville allowed them to escape high wages, a small labor pool, and belligerent labor unions.³⁷ Stinson constructed a one million square-foot facility in southeast Nashville and in 1940 had a \$43 million dollar contract with the British government to manufacture dive-bombers.³⁸ At the end of 1940, Vultee Aircraft acquired Stinson Aviation and by 1941, Vultee’s production included a \$36 million deal with the U.S. government. In 1943, Vultee Aircraft merged with Consolidated Aircraft to become Consolidated Vultee Aircraft. Headquartered in San Diego, California, Consolidated Vultee was controlled by two parent companies, the Avco Manufacturing Corporation and the Atlas Corporation, which were also involved in aircraft production. Victor Emmanuel, president of Avco and Vultee, was drawn to Nashville as a potential location for the firm by friend Silliman Evans, editor-in-chief of the *Tennessean* and member of the Nashville Chamber of Commerce, which was composed of powerful members of the local business elite. Evans, a Nashville business booster, enticed Emmanuel with the prospect of cheap power and materials provided by the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA) located in East Tennessee.³⁹ Vultee was the third largest producer of military equipment during the war in the U.S., surpassed only by General Motors and Curtiss Wright.⁴⁰ The firm accounted for thirteen percent of the nation’s war production output in 1944, and while it operated thirteen plants in ten different states, Vultee’s Nashville plant was one of its five major facilities.⁴¹ The

³⁶ Ibid., 109.

³⁷ Ibid., 109-110.

³⁸ Robert Spinney, *World War II in Nashville: Transformation of the Homefront* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1998), 20.

³⁹ Bill Carey, *Fortune, Fiddles and Fried Chicken* (Franklin, Tenn.: Hillsboro Press, 2000), 134.

⁴⁰ Spinney, “Social Change and Public Sector Expansion,” 51.

⁴¹ Ibid., 50.

Nashville division made more than 1,500 A-31 Vultee Vengeance dive-bombers for the Royal Airforce and the U.S. Army Air Force.⁴² In addition, the plant produced O-40 Vultee Vigilant Liberator bombers, P-38 Lightning fighter planes, and parts for B-24 Liberator bombers.⁴³ By 1943, Vultee employed 7,000 individuals, becoming the largest industrial employer in Middle Tennessee.

With the opening of the Stinson plant in Nashville, the International Association of Machinists (IAM), a union affiliated with the AFL and indigenous to the South, sent labor organizer Harry Summers to organize the plant. Originally, workers were afraid to attend union meetings because they feared that the company would lay them off. According to Spinney, instead of demanding a showdown with Stinson management, Summers assuaged the fears of workers and the company by forcing Machinist leadership to appear moderate. As Spinney argues, “union officials did all they could to dispel the appearance of militancy and sell themselves as a loyal, dependable, 100 percent American organization.”⁴⁴ The IAM was a southern union, and organizers perhaps understood the underpinnings associated with unionization in the South, such as southern business elites’ distaste for union militancy. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Machinists took a conciliatory attitude towards management. By late 1940, the Machinists, Local 735, claimed that they held the majority of authorization cards, which verified workers’ support of the union and was needed to call for a NLRB election. Stinson had two options: accept or challenge the NLRB election. If Stinson accepted, a consent election would take place in which the Machinists and a company-sponsored “union,” the Stinson Employee’s Organization (SEO), would be on the ballot. If Stinson contested, a NLRB investigation would take place, and if the Machinists were found to hold the

⁴² Spinney, *World War II in Nashville*, 21.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 21.

majority of authorization cards. an ordered election would occur. allowing any union to be on the ballot, including the militant CIO.⁴⁵

At the time, City Hall was under the leadership of Mayor Thomas Cummings who Spinney claims, “represented the business community’s nascent desire to formalize its control of the city.”⁴⁶ City Hall often sided with the business community, however, when the threat of the CIO being on the ballot at Stinson arose, Cummings supported the consent election and became involved in negotiations. As Spinney explains, City Hall believed that by accepting the moderate Machinists, it would deny the CIO an opportunity to organize the plant, enabling the business community to retain control over organized labor which was needed in order to maintain their doctrine of economic growth. When Vultee bought out Stinson in 1941, the company had recently lost an election to the CIO at its plant in Dowrey, California. Unwilling to lose another, Vultee agreed to the consent election, leading to a Machinists’ victory of 294 votes to 196 votes for the SEO, resulting in Local 735 becoming the largest aircraft union in the South.⁴⁷

Little is known about the composition of Local 735 at Vultee. However, because the Machinists were AFL-affiliated. not all Vultee employees were members of the union. Given that the company had 900 employees when the 1941 NLRB election took place, the Machinists constituted only a portion of the workforce.⁴⁸ According to the *Vultee Volunteer*, a war propaganda newsletter at the plant, the Machinists’ 1942 bargaining unit included production and maintenance employees, production control station clerks, inspectors, and stock chasers.⁴⁹ At the height of Vultee’s employment in 1943, the Machinists represented 73 percent of the

⁴⁴ Spinney, “Social Change and Public Sector Expansion,” 114.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 113.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 114.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁹ “Plant Renews Agreement with Local 735.” *Vultee Volunteer*, 11 September 1942. p. 1.

workforce.⁵⁰ Interestingly, despite its AFL-affiliation, the Machinists did not only represent skilled workers because stock chasers and production control station clerks were unskilled employees. Both were part of the production control department at the plant, which coordinated supplies and materials between departments and were referred to by the *Volunteer* as “the grease that lubricates the gears of production.”⁵¹ Consequently, it is not surprising that if management wanted to avoid major work stoppages, particularly during wartime production, unskilled workers would be included in the bargaining unit. Moreover, absenteeism was a considerable problem during the war at Vultee and the rate of employee turnover was considerably high. By including unskilled workers in the bargaining unit, this might have prevented workers from leaving the plant to enlist or from seeking employment elsewhere. However, portions of the workforce were excluded from the union. Office personnel were non-union members. Black workers were banned from joining the union and often given menial, unskilled jobs at the plant. However, they constituted less than 1 percent of the workforce in 1942 because Local 735 refused them production jobs.⁵² There were some women in Local 735. One even participated in the negotiations of the 1942 contract. Nevertheless, the Machinists had an open shop in which workers were not required to join the union as a prerequisite for work, and women were simply less likely to join the union.

Given Machinist leadership’s commitment to moderation, union members realized that rather than addressing the demands of workers, the union was content to maintain good relations with management and did so from 1940 to 1943. According to Spinney, the Machinists’ open

⁵⁰ Spinney, “Social Change and Public Sector Expansion,” 115.

⁵¹ “Vultee’s Unsung Heroes of Production: ‘Stockchasers’ Doing Important Job.” *Vultee Volunteer*. 12 March 1943, p. 3.

⁵² Spinney, “Social Change and Public Sector Expansion,” 208.

shop helped diluted their bargaining power.⁵³ Moreover, Machinist leaders were instrumental in suppressing workers' grievances with the company. In 1940, Summers confided to Henry Tate, Vultee's executive general manager, that union members were "'beginning to almost get from under my control, as I held the men in just about as long as I could.'"⁵⁴ In 1941, skilled machinists made as much as \$1.30 per hour while the majority of workers at the plant made 62 cents per hour. Even though the Machinists represented a certain portion of unskilled workers, its leadership was unwilling to contest Vultee's 50 cent per hour minimum wage, which was well below national and industry standards, even though it was in accordance with regional levels.⁵⁵ Negotiations concerning wage hikes became a considerable problem in 1942 when the Little Steel Formula went into effect after U.S. entry into World War II. The Little Steel Formula required that the WLB approve any wage increases before they went into effect. Faced with a labor shortage in Nashville, Vultee management pleaded with the WLB to approve a 5 cent per hour incremental raise, which took effect in August 1943, but was still below national standards.⁵⁶

The Machinists also succumbed to Vultee's intimidation tactics. The union said little when management began to hire female workers due to the labor shortage. At Vultee, women constituted 30 percent of its workforce until 1943, when the U.S. military reprimanded the company because it claimed that female laborers were leaking production secrets to their boyfriends.⁵⁷ Vultee preferred female workers because they were more willing to work for the 50 cent per hour minimum wage and less likely to join the union.⁵⁸ Other intimidation tactics on the part of management were more aggressive. Seventy-five armed guards patrolled the shop

⁵³ Ibid., 128.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 116.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 117.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

floor, and management threatened to cancel draft deferments of “uncooperative” employees in order to weaken the Machinists’ strength at the plant.⁵⁹

As workers became disillusioned with the Machinists, Vultee experienced a series of wildcat strikes in 1943 and 1944, without the union’s approval or public knowledge. Both the conservative, anti-labor *Nashville Banner*, published by local businessman James Stahlman, and Silliman Evan’s liberal *Tennessean*, which was also unsympathetic to labor unions, failed to report the work stoppages for the sake of war solidarity. Moreover, both Stahlman and Evans were prominent members of the business community and close associates of Victor Emmanuel, and had lobbied for Vultee to locate to Nashville.⁶⁰ Workers involved in the wildcat strikes protested Vultee’s unwillingness to reclassify workers. Wages rates had been frozen in the steel industry by the Little Steel Formula. The only way to adjust these wages was for management to reclassify jobs. At Vultee, workers were often required to do work that was a higher classification but at lower classification pay rates. By November 1943, workers filed over 250 reclassification grievances with the WLB.⁶¹ Adding to worker unrest was the fact that inflation was rising disproportionately to wages in 1943, resulting in Vultee’s 50 cent per hour minimum wage falling below the average cost of living.

With the onset of the work stoppages, relations between the Machinists and Vultee turned sour; Machinist leadership sided with workers and in 1944 management cut off its “cordial” dealings with Local 735. Moreover, management imposed a series of restrictive measures on the union. Vultee arbitrarily began laying off employees, denying merit-based raises to union

⁵⁷ “Women Now 33 % of Aircraft Workers,” *Vultee Volunteer*, 2 July 1943 p. 3.

⁵⁸ Spinney, “Social Change and Public Sector Expansion,” 118.

⁵⁹ Spinney, *World War II in Nashville*, 39.

⁶⁰ Silliman Evans to James Stahlman, 6 June 1994 in James Stahlman Papers 8 Folder, IV-18 Box, Special Collections, Vanderbilt Univ., Nashville, Tenn.

⁶¹ Spinney, “Social Change and Public Sector Expansion,” 120.

members, and ignoring seniority-based promotions.⁶² Workers' grievances continued to multiply so that by March 1944, the Machinists' grievance committeeman spent ten days hearing and filing complaints.⁶³

Relations between the union and management continued to deteriorate through 1945, when at the end of the war, Vultee began to alter its production from aircraft manufacturing to deep-freeze units, kitchen ranges, and motor coach bodies. With the transformation of production, Vultee reduced its workforce from a wartime peak of 7,000 employees to 2,000. In the process, the company laid off many Machinists who were a source of strength for the union and replaced them with non-union demoted personnel employees.⁶⁴ Further weakening the union was Vultee's refusal in 1946 to renew the Machinists' bargaining contract. Instead, the company rescinded wartime concessions by unilaterally canceling the maintenance of membership fee agreements, vacation pay, and union dues check-offs.⁶⁵ In 1946, after an abortive attempt to strike and with only 200 members left in Local 735, the Machinists were forced to agree to a humiliating contract that provided for wage reductions, setting wages at a level equivalent to the early war years.

The Siege of Militancy: The Steelworker's Unionization of NashCo

With worker resentment deeply entrenched by 1946, the radical CIO saw Vultee as a potential candidate for organization. The union developed a distinct model of unionization during the 1930s. The CIO called for non-exclusionary unionization, which consolidated workers from broad industrial sectors—steel, rubber, auto, chemical and textiles, into a single

⁶² Spinney, *World War II in Nashville*, 39.

⁶³ Spinney, "Social Change and Public Sector Expansion," 120.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁶⁵ Spinney, *World War II in Nashville*, 39.

entity— rather than organizing by craft, as did the older AFL. New Deal legislation, specifically the Wagner Act of 1935, strengthened the power of unions to represent workers and bargain collectively. The Wagner Act allowed for a closed shop, in which workers were obligated by contract to join a union as a precondition for work. Moreover, the Wagner Act had delegated collective bargaining regulation to the NLRB. Unlike the Machinists, the CIO was militant in its willingness to address the grievances of its members, which included working conditions and low wages. The CIO promoted itself as a horizontal union, in which there was “no discrimination, complete representation, service to all, and opportunity for all members.” In addition, the CIO publicized its success in other southern firms such as ALCOA, where it succeeded in reducing the North-South wage differential, a primary concern of workers.⁶⁶

The CIO’s emphasis on being a horizontal union with complete representation was key to its organizing efforts at Vultee. While Local 735 was the collective bargainer for skilled and unskilled workers in 1942, by 1946 the union did not represent 60 percent of the workforce.⁶⁷ This might have resulted from having an open shop or because the bargaining unit might have been altered after the plant was retooled to produce consumer goods. In any case, unskilled employees suffered the most from low wages even though some were represented by the Machinists. Consequently, they most likely harbored the greatest resentment towards Machinist leadership and the company. In 1945, skilled machinists made as much as \$1.05 to \$1.50 per hour while unskilled employees had a minimum wage of 60 cents per hour.⁶⁸ The CIO’s commitment to complete representation appealed to non-machinists because it enabled them to equally reap the benefits of union membership.

⁶⁶ *Vultee Flash*, 22 February 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 15 Folder, 1875 Box Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, 1947, SLA.

⁶⁷ Spinney, “Social Change and Public Sector Expansion,” 123.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 121-122.

In 1947, Vultee became the Nashville Corporation, or “NashCo,” after Avco and Atlas separated the non-aviation sector of Vultee. Little is known about the workforce composition of NashCo in 1947. However, Spinney explains that when the war ended in 1945, many women left the workforce, as did many individuals who came from nearby rural counties to be wartime laborers. After the war, 15,000 veterans returned to Nashville, and while most found jobs, by 1946 half of the city’s unemployed were veterans.⁶⁹ Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that veterans constituted a large portion of NashCo's employees. This distinct composition of the workforce helped CIO efforts at NashCo because veterans often had exposure outside of the southern “culture of dependence” during World War II. These experiences introduced southern soldiers to the fact that class-consciousness was an important issue outside of the region and rarely went unnoticed as it had below the Mason-Dixon Line. Moreover, veterans’ exposure to the rhetoric of democratic norms and social equality during the war might have helped contribute to the recognition of their false dependency on management and the inequity of this relationship. Steelworker organizers realized this, and targeted veterans at the plant by focusing on the appeal of democratic norms, and promoting free union membership for veterans.

Organizing NashCo fell under the umbrella of Operation Dixie activities, which came to Nashville in 1947. Nashville organizers were led by CIO area director Louis Krainock, a northerner and a World War II veteran, who saw Nashville as strategically important because the city was vehemently anti-union and relatively unorganized. If organizers could gain a foothold in Nashville, Krainock believed it would strengthen the CIO’s position in the city vis-à-vis its rival, the AFL. NashCo was one of the largest industrial plants in the city, and its strong worker resentment of Machinist leadership and management, guaranteed organizers a CIO victory given its commitment to complete representation and its aggressiveness in obtaining concessions.

Moreover, because the CIO had previously won a victory at the Vultee plant in Dowrey, California, organizers may have believed that management might be more willing to accept CIO representation. A month after the Steelworkers began organizing the plant, organizers were confident concerning their efforts. In one instance, they were approached by a worker who was willing to help organize after he had been dropped from \$1.10 to 72 cents per hour.⁷⁰ In addition, actual machinists began to grow resentful of their leadership. An optimistic Krainock reported to Tennessee CIO state director Paul Christopher that “Vultee looks good. There is considerable dissatisfaction over lack of IAM help to production workers, over reclassification downwards, and over the firing of four IAM council representatives without protest from the union.”⁷¹

The Steelworkers began organizing NashCo in January 1947. In the *Vultee Flash*, a CIO newsletter at the plant, organizers ridiculed the Machinists, accusing them of being a “vertical union, discriminatory in representation, service, and opportunity” because of its craft-oriented structure and inability to represent unskilled workers.⁷² The Machinists’ inability to equally represent unskilled employees might have been because of its AFL-affiliation, and therefore its leadership felt more comfortable with elite craft unionism rather than modern industrial labor organization, as in the case of the CIO. Organizers promoted the CIO as a “democratic labor union, in which each member shall have a voice and a vote,” which they hoped would solidify CIO support at the plant because it appealed to unskilled employees and veterans.⁷³ However, organization within the plant was slow. Workers were hesitant to join the CIO out of fear that management would lay them off. The Steelworkers believed that there was an inherent sense of

⁶⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 124.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *Vultee Flash*, 22 February 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 15 Folder, 1875 Box Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, 1947, SLA.

⁷³ *Vultee Flash*, 28 February 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 15 Folder, 1875 Box Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, 1947, SLA.

paternalism combined with intimidation that prevented workers from joining the union. In the *Vultee Flash*, the Steelworkers bitterly complained:

Paternalism—"the company making everything right"— is the place where the worker starts to lose the battle. Belief in paternalism is the same thing as believing your groceryman is doing you a favor when he accepts your payment...[it] means that the worker doesn't really know that management gives him the things labor unions had to fight to get established. Out at Vultee there are some workers who have been taken in by paternalism. By a pat on the shoulder. By a raise from "knowing somebody." By a few kind words.⁷⁴

However, this may not have been industrial paternalism as much as it was the company's attempts to reinforce the principle of individualism. By promoting workers based on company loyalty, management ensured that class-consciousness and worker solidarity was subverted, thereby maintaining control over the workforce and maximizing profits. Worker resentment was too great to explain that paternalism slowed CIO organization. Rather, fear over loss of economic security prevented workers from joining the union. Moreover, the relationship between management and the Machinists was inoperative for so long that workers may not have initially identified with a union that was: (1) committed to addressing workers' grievances and (2) dedicated to worker solidarity, which was contradictory to the corporatist nature of southern society.

Tensions between the Steelworkers and Machinists contributed to the CIO's slow progress. Seeing the Steelworkers as a powerful rival to the Machinists' role at the plant, and recognizing that they stood little chance against the Steelworkers in a NLRB election, leaders of

⁷⁴ *Vultee Flash*, 8 July 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 15 Folder, 1875 Box Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation. 1947. SLA.

Local 735 distributed leaflets throughout the plant, attempting to discredit the CIO. They asked: “isn’t today the better tomorrow the CIO wanted you to join yesterday? Are the Steelworkers afraid to reveal their past (specifically their failure at other plants), by trying to keep your mind on the future?”⁷⁵ In response to the Machinists’ criticism, the Steelworkers in the *Vultee Flash* responded, “We do not believe that mudslinging wins wages, that it advances the worker economically. We don’t believe that ridiculing another union brings in more members. We don’t believe that you organize by not organizing.”⁷⁶

Despite the Machinists’ publicity tactics, worker resentment was so pervasive that Steelworker membership continued to grow. By August, Krainock victoriously reported to CIO committeemen at NashCo that “membership cards are rolling in. [The] CIO is taking Vultee. We stand to win by an overwhelming majority if you will just do your part.”⁷⁷ A confident Krainock reported to Christopher in October 1947 that “as long as the delay might be, it is giving us an opportunity to build up a militant, strong local union, based upon positive principles of the CIO’s program, rather than an organization whose strength lies largely in the worker’s dissatisfaction with their present bargaining agent.”⁷⁸ Thus, by solidifying support at the plant with such principles as complete representation and service to all, CIO organizers hoped to ensure that the workforce would not easily turn against them.

Earlier in May, NashCo had begun to lay off Machinists who were sympathetic to the CIO, revealing that management feared that the union would usurp their control over workers as members of Local 735 began to turn against its leadership. However, this tactic was

⁷⁵ “CIO is Crowing Everyday!”, n.d. in Operation Dixie, Series 3, Reel #51, Univ. of Virginia., Charlottesville, Va.

⁷⁶ *Vultee Flash*, 14 May 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 15 Folder, 1875 Box Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, 1947, SLA.

⁷⁷ Louis Krainock to CIO Commitment, 15 August 1947, in Operation Dixie, Series 3, Reel #51, Univ. of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.

⁷⁸ Louis Krainock to Paul R. Christopher, 18 October 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 1 Folder, 1874 Box Louis Krainock-Area Director, 1947, SLA.

counterproductive because new employees sided with the Steelworkers given their promises of higher wages. In a letter to Christopher, a self-assured Krainock reported, "our position has been improved by the laying off of thirty Tool and Die men. This cuts into the stronghold of the IAM as well as weakens the faith of its remaining members."⁷⁹

In order to diminish CIO support at the plant and maintain control over workers, NashCo and Machinist leadership renewed relations with each other. By renegotiating the humiliating 1946 contract, both parties hoped to diffuse the Steelworkers' support and bar them from a NLRB election. The contract was set to expire March 13, 1947; it could be renewed however, as early as February 11. Once the contract was renewed, NashCo legally could deny the Steelworkers representation. However, in order to claim representation, the NLRB stipulated that the CIO had to inform the Board that it represented the majority of workers by collecting the majority of authorization cards before the Machinists and NashCo renewed their contract.

On February 11, NashCo and the Machinists renewed the 1946 contract. The agreement was signed just after midnight and NashCo refused to agree to wage increases, threatening to move the plant to Florida. In a letter to Christopher, Krainock reported, "the IAM in its anxiety to secure the company's agreement to this collusive act, accepted the company's terms without argument and undertook the burden of selling the contract terms to the affected employees."⁸⁰ The contract reinstated the maintenance of membership provision, however, it dealt a deadly blow to the Machinist's support by calling for a wage reduction of two cents per hour and prohibiting workers from withdrawing from Local 735. Machinist leadership's willingness to sign such a contract in order to maintain its role in the plant revealed that they feared that the CIO would win the NLRB election. The following day the CIO submitted its authorization

⁷⁹ Ibid.

cards, asserting that the February 11 contract did not bar them from calling for a new election. A concerned Krainock remarked to Meyer Bernstein in the research department of the CIO that “at Vultee...we are now engaged in a legal battle, with the IAM (present bargaining agent) and Vultee contending that a prematurely signed contract is a bar to an election.”⁸¹ The Steelworkers, in order to further de-legitimize Machinist’s support, blasted its leadership and NashCo in the *Vultee Flash* declaring that they “knowingly and deceptively forced this contract on [the workers]” which was a “behind the door conspiracy between management and the IAM.”⁸² The Steelworkers promoted themselves as an organization that prided itself on transparency and its commitment to all members adding, “when you give the CIO the right to bargain for you in a new contract you will receive much more than anything this ‘phony contract’ has given you.”⁸³ Consequently, the Steelworkers appealed to the NLRB to hold an election at NashCo.

In response, the Machinists declared that the CIO’s authorization cards were invalid. Moreover, in an attempt to maintain their role at the plant, they used the cancellation card, which invalidated CIO authorization cards by withdrawing worker support from the Steelworkers. A dubious Krainock reported to Christopher that union organizers were “unable to estimate how many of these have been mailed. It is easy, of course to forge such cards. I do not know what effect, if any, they will have on the Board.”⁸⁴ Despite the Machinists’ attacks, the Steelworkers continued to gain support among workers. Because of the NLRB’s slowness in responding to the

⁸⁰ Louis Krainock to Paul R. Christopher, 22 February 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 14 Folder, 1873 Box Louis Krainock-Area Director, 1947, SLA.

⁸¹ Louis Krainock to Meyer Bernstein, 28 February 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 14 Folder, 1873 Box Louis Krainock-Area Director, 1947, SLA.

⁸² *Vultee Flash*, 22 February 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 15 Folder, 1875 Box Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, 1947, SLA.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Louis Krainock to Paul R. Christopher, 22 February 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 14 Folder, 1873 Box Louis Krainock-Area Director, 1947, SLA.

CIO's petition, Krainock assertively told Christopher in July, "petition or no petition, we are building now on the basis upon which we can act to get recognition without going through the NLRB."⁸⁵

The Machinists successfully delayed the issue of representation for six months. However, in August, the NLRB sided with the Steelworkers, accepting their petition to hold an election on August 20, 1947. The Board ruled that the Machinists' contract with NashCo had not taken effect until February 12. Therefore, the Steelworkers succeeded in meeting the deadline before the agreement became active and the contract "[did] not constitute a bar to a present determination of representative"⁸⁶

August-September 1947: NLRB Election and Result

On August 20, the NLRB-sponsored election at NashCo took place. Approximately 1,907 employees were eligible to vote and the election resulted in an overwhelming victory for the Steelworkers of 904 votes to 464 votes for the Machinists (500 eligible employees did not vote).⁸⁷ Included in the Steelworkers' bargaining unit were production and maintenance employees. This included: production control dispatchers, inspectors, stock clerks, shop follow-up crib attendants, loftsmen, and template makers. Compared to the Machinists' 1942 bargaining unit, the Steelworkers' was relatively the same with the exception of shop follow-up crib attendants, loftsmen, and template makers. Excluded from the bargaining unit were office personnel and salaried employees, including anyone "with the right to hire, fire, discipline or

⁸⁵ Krainock to Paul R. Christopher, 16 July 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 15 Folder 1873 Box Louis Krainock- Area Director, 1947, SLA.

⁸⁶ Decisions and Orders of the National Labor Relations Board (Washington DC), Case 10-R-2546, 7 August 1947.

⁸⁷ Report of Results of NLRB Election, Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, NLRB Case 10-R-2546, 20 August 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 1 Folder. 1900 Box. NLRB Elections (Tenn.) 1947-1949. SLA.

effect changes in status.”⁸⁸ Krainock hoped “to win by such a majority [that] Vultee [would] know we mean business when we go for even better rates than the CIO already has...at two Vultee plants in Wayne, Michigan and Dowrey Field.”⁸⁹ Because of their success, the Steelworkers began to elect office officials and set up grievance committees at the plant, where as they promised in the *Vultee Flash* in February, “every worker [would] be given an opportunity to present their grievances and have adjustments made correcting existing conditions.”⁹⁰ Despite their landslide victory, the Steelworkers were concerned that NashCo would not bargain, given its attempts to bar the union from a NLRB election. In September, an apprehensive Krainock confided to Christopher that “Vultee management has a representative making the rounds of area plants checking wage rates. While this may mean that Vultee is getting ready to deal with USA-CIO, it may also mean that Vultee is getting ready to give a wage increase and wipe out USA’s program.”⁹¹

Two days after the NLRB election took place; the Taft-Hartley Act was passed under the conservative Republican-controlled, Eightieth Congress. Van Bittner referred to Taft-Hartley as “without a doubt the most fascist and communistic law enacted in the history of our government.”⁹² The legislation served as a conservative counterattack to weaken the labor movement, which had extended its power under the Wagner Act. In effect, Taft-Hartley remanded union shops to state control. It abolished the closed shop, introducing the “right to work” clause where states determined whether union shops were legal. Union shop laws

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Louis Krainock to CIO Commitment, 15 August 1947, in Operation Dixie. Series 3. Reel #51, Univ. of Virginia., Charlottesville, Va.

⁹⁰ *Vultee Flash*, 22 February 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 15 Folder, 1875 Box Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, 1947. SLA.

⁹¹ Louis Krainock to Paul R. Christopher, 18 October 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 1 Folder, 1874 Box Louis Krainock-Area Director, 1947. SLA.

⁹² Van A. Bittner to Directors and Staff members of CIO Organizing Committee, 24 June 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 1 Folder. 1874 Box Louis Krainock-Area Director, 1947. SLA.

required workers to join a union and pay dues after a specific period, preventing “free riders” who enjoyed the benefits of a collectively bargained contract without paying high union dues. Free riders contributed to lower union membership and morale because it weakened the union’s bargaining power, reflected in the Machinists’ open shop at the plant before 1947. Further diminishing unions’ bargaining power was enactment of state anti-union laws. State right-to-work laws were passed at the end of 1947 in such southern states as Arkansas, Georgia, Texas, North Carolina, and Tennessee. In February, the Tennessee State legislature, dominated by rural counties, passed a “right to work” law, banning the union shop. The measure passed 26-7 in the Senate and 64-26 in the House. Opponents of the law declared it a “vicious anti-labor legislation promulgat[ed] by ‘country’ legislators who do not understand or sympathize with the problems of labor.”⁹³ Taft-Hartley also included a loyalty oath clause, which created various legal problems for the Steelworkers at NashCo. Due to increasing fear of the left and the intensifying of the Cold War, legislators inserted a clause requiring unions to sign a loyalty oath that confirmed that communists were not associated with the organization. If a union did not agree to the affidavit, the NLRB could refuse certification, preventing them from becoming the collective bargainer at the firm. The Machinists were one of the first unions to sign. However, CIO President, Philip Murray adamantly opposed the clause and refused to sign the affidavit. Using the CIO’s non-compliance with the loyalty oath as a point of contention, the Machinists petitioned the NLRB, asking it to apply Taft-Hartley retroactively. If the Board ruled that Taft-Hartley was applicable to the August election, the CIO’s non-compliance with the anti-communist clause would force the Board to declare the election invalid.

⁹³ Leslie T. Hart, “House Calls Up Open Shop Bill 64-26: Final Vote Sought as Debate Gets Underway,” *The Nashville Banner*, 18 February 1947, p. 16. Hereafter *The Nashville Banner* will be referred to as the *Banner*

Despite the Machinists' petition to the NLRB, on September 19, the Steelworkers submitted a ten-point list of demands to NashCo management. The program addressed the concerns of workers, including wages, benefits, security, job advancement, and participation in management decisions. With respect to wages, the Steelworkers asked for a general wage increase of 30 cents per hour. This would have raised the minimum wage at the plant to 88 cents per hour and the maximum wage to \$2.07 per hour. The wage hike applied to all workers, a vast difference from Machinist leadership who tended to ignore unskilled workers. The Steelworkers also demanded no reduction in wage rates for the length of the agreement, even if an employee was assigned to a lower-rated job and a shift premium of 10 cents per hour for second and third shift work. The insistence of no wage reductions ensured that the company could not rescind its concessions as it did with the Machinists in 1943. Furthermore, the shift premium compensated workers for working odd hours, which occurred on a regular basis at the plant without additional compensation.

The Steelworkers also asked for various benefits to be expanded or re-instituted after they had been taken away from workers in 1946. These included: seven paid holidays, double time for holidays worked, seven sick days leaves, two weeks paid vacation after one year, which had been taken away from workers, and three weeks paid vacation after five years. In addition, the company was to provide security for workers through benefit programs as a social insurance program paid for by NashCo, which included death and retirement benefits, time lost due to illness or personal accident, and medical care for workers and dependents. These concessions were new demands imposed on the company. In the past, management did not provide such extensive programs for workers, much less family members. However, the Steelworkers' 10-point program reflects the CIO's liberal New Deal ideology in that despite improved economic

conditions in the post-war economy, it was not enough for management to provide wages and meager benefits. Rather, the CIO believed that the company had to assume responsibility for its employees by providing a social safety net, which would create greater economic security for workers.

The union also demanded the development of programs to provide for the advancement of workers. Included were on-site job training for advancement and promotions to senior employees who were to receive the established job rate upon being promoted, which had been cancelled by the company in 1944.⁹⁴ While management provided job training at the plant during the war years, the CIO's programs allowed for what organizers called in the July issue of the *Vultee Flash*, "a step upward and forward."⁹⁵ Job advancement programs would promote specialization as well as provide various opportunities for workers in Nashville, where most people lacked the skills associated with the heavy industrial sector because of the relatively few firms. In addition, the promotion of senior employees ensured a system of meritocracy at the plant, preventing management from underscoring individualism by promoting "loyal" employees. Rather, this ensured that workers did not remain dependent on the "goodwill" of management, but on their expertise and experience.

Perhaps the most militant aspect of the Steelworker's 10-point program in the eyes of NashCo was the union's desire to participate in management decisions. The Steelworkers demanded a joint union-management program to classify jobs so that every worker received equal pay for equal work, and a review of the incentive system and production standards, which would eliminate inequities. Both programs addressed the issue of reclassification, which had

⁹⁴ The Metro Archives of Nashville recorded that the article from which the Steelworkers' demands are taken from, was from *Tennessean* on January 10, 1947. However, there is no record on microfilm of this article being in *Tennessean* or *Banner* in January 1947 or 1948.

generated worker resentment since 1943. These demands were different from those imposed on the company by Machinist leadership because they placed the Steelworkers on an even playing field with the company. By establishing an equal relationship between labor and management, the Steelworker's program ensured that the company could not control and manipulate workers through an incentive system. Finally, the Steelworkers demanded that NashCo recognize the union as the official bargaining agent of the workers, asking them to meet with union officials and end its recognition of the Machinists.

Several days later on September 24, NashCo responded that it could not collectively bargain or meet with Steelworker officials. Despite the CIO's overwhelming victory in August, the union was not certified by the NLRB because of its refusal to sign the anti-communist clause. NashCo contested the NLRB ruling of the February 11 contract, claiming that it had a legal agreement with the Machinists that it could not break until the CIO was certified. In addition, the company argued that because the Machinists' petition to the Board was active, it prevented them from negotiating with the Steelworkers. George Hastings, industrial relations director of NashCo, posted a notice in October claiming that management did want to deal with the Steelworkers, but could not legally bargain with them under the conditions of Taft-Hartley. However, had the Machinists' contract been valid, the Board would not have allowed the election to take place. Krainock sarcastically remarked to Christopher that Hasting's comment was "altogether a very pretty gesture. And maybe George heard the mutterings about 'shut'er down'."⁹⁶

⁹⁵ *Vultee Flash*, 8 July 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 15 Folder, 1875 Box Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, 1947. SLA

⁹⁶ Louis Krainock to Paul R. Christopher, 11 October 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 1 Folder, 1874 Box Louis Krainock-Area Director, 1947. SLA.

In order to weaken CIO support at the plant, NashCo had begun to layoff CIO workers on a daily basis in mid-September. However, organizers remained optimistic about their role in the plant. In October, a confident Krainock reported to Christopher that “spirit is mounting within the plant and at last night’s meeting, Phil Clowes (a CIO international representative) had to handle the growing move to shut the place down.”⁹⁷ The following week, a sanguine Krainock reported to Christopher, “the pressure...[is] mounting considerably, and it would not surprise me to see drastic measures taken in the next couple of weeks...The company is scared of USA-CIO.”⁹⁸

Conclusion

In the simplest terms, the Machinist’s moderation before 1947 failed at NashCo and only served to escalate workers’ grievances with management. Rather than establish strong union solidarity among workers, thereby creating an effective collective bargaining agent, the Machinists not only ignored unskilled workers in their bargaining unit, but skilled machinists as well. Instead, Machinist leadership relied on the amicable relationship between themselves and management, which reinforced the corporatist structure of the plant. However, it is important to note that the IAM, because of its affiliation with the AFL, had a long tradition of skilled craft unionism since it was founded in Atlanta in 1888. In this respect, it is not surprising that the Machinists were more content with the corporatist nature of Nashville and the company, rather than class-awareness and committed worker solidarity in modern industrial unionism. Wartime economic conditions and U.S. government policy allowed Vultee to take advantage of workers without any serious consequences until the wildcat strikes in 1943 and 1944. Once the war

⁹⁷ Ibid.

ended, worker resentment of management and the union was rampant. But Vultee's tactics of intimidation and violence squashed any inklings of worker solidarity, which was reinforced by the Machinists' inability to object to company tactics because of its weakness at the plant. As Vultee entered the postwar economy and altered its production line, worker resentment was so powerful that Vultee became "ripe" for a pro-active, anti-management union, such as the CIO.

The Steelworkers, because of their radical and militant measures, including its appeal to unskilled workers, succeeded in exploiting workers' grievances. Unlike the Machinists, the Steelworkers recognized the importance of establishing strong worker solidarity so management would have greater difficulty in its "divide and conquer" tactics. By generating solidarity, NashCo workers became more aware of the unequal and exploitative nature of the bond between themselves and management. The company did not "make everything right" as the Machinists believed. This was seen when management began to lay off disgruntled workers in February, which undermined employees' sense of security and further alienated them from the union and NashCo. Thus, the Steelworkers succeeded in temporarily curbing the dependent relationship between labor and management, reflected in their landslide victory in the August election.

NashCo saw the CIO as a tremendous threat to company domination when it arrived in January 1947. CIO militancy was antagonistic to the principles of maximizing profits and management's control over the shop floor. The company knew that the CIO could easily take the plant, shutting it down if necessary to acquire better working conditions, given its victories at other Vultee plants, specifically in Dowrey, California in 1941. NashCo's February contract with the Machinists and its arbitrary layoffs of CIO sympathizers validated Krainock's assumption that NashCo feared the CIO.

⁹⁸ Louis Krainock to Paul R. Christopher, 18 October 1947 in AFL-CIO Region 8 1 Folder, 1874 Box Louis Krainock-Area Director, 1947, SLA.

While the Steelworkers' efforts threatened company domination, it also jeopardized the Machinists' role at the plant. NashCo's February contract and its layoffs point to the fact that the company feared the Steelworkers because of the union's ability to capitalize on worker resentment and generate worker solidarity. However, management took a "hands-off" policy in the initial outbreak of the conflict, and their objections remained within the legal interpretations of Taft-Hartley. Rather, the Machinists were in the forefront, publicly attacking the CIO and its policies, which was reflected in its petition to the NLRB to declare the election invalid based on Taft-Hartley. One could argue that this was purely a dispute between two unions and not a labor-management conflict. However, the relationship between the Machinists and NashCo before 1947 was conditioned as a relationship of dependency. Consequently, anyone who disrupted it created conflict between themselves and the Machinists because it undermined the union's sense of security. The relationship between management and the Machinists also ensured that class identity and worker solidarity were not issues at NashCo. Therefore, when the Steelworkers entered the plant and raised the issue of class-consciousness among workers by generating solidarity, it created tensions within the corporatist class structure. Consequently, the Machinists assailed them because the CIO was an outside aggressor who threatened their sense of security and whose organizing efforts ran countercurrent to the class structure of the South.

Chapter Two: "A Campaign of Lawlessness"

On February 23, 1948, when the Steelworkers' strike ended, the *Banner* triumphantly declared that the CIO "should have learned something from this experience; namely, that the tactics employed do not set well with southern citizens, whether employee or employer; and that a campaign of lawlessness is not acclimated to an area opposed to anarchy or calculated to win friends and influence people."⁹⁹ Ironically, the Steelworkers' strike was anything but a "campaign of lawlessness." Rather, it was in the courts that the company battled it out with Steelworker officials. Barbara Griffith argues that in the South "sophisticated legal machinery was [often] mobilized for use" by the business elite.¹⁰⁰ She contends that management often filed injunctions or damage suits in state and federal courts to serve as a diversionary tactic for labor organizers. Consequently, CIO attorneys were so busy fighting the company in the courts that they were unable to use their legal expertise in a more effective manner.¹⁰¹ In the case of NashCo, the Steelworkers undermined company authority by promoting worker solidarity and temporarily curbing workers' dependency on management. In response, the company used "sophisticated legal machinery" to maintain control over workers and the situation. The applicability of Taft-Hartley to the strike allowed NashCo to use the conservative legislation to dispute the Steelworker's contention that they were the collective bargainer at the plant. The NashCo case was one of the first labor disputes to be tested under Taft-Hartley. Reporters at the *Banner* and the *Tennessean* often referred to it as a "test case," in which all eyes were on the plant to see how the NLRB would rule under the new legislation.

The strategy pursued by NashCo attorneys in the courts was complex. Restrictions placed on unions by Taft-Hartley, and the ambiguity surrounding the issue of mass picketing,

⁹⁹ "CIO Lost Its Test Case of 'Operation Dixie,'" *Banner*, 23 February 1948, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Griffith, 94.

allowed the company to manipulate the statute to de-legitimize the Steelworkers' legal claims. This strategy was successful because of the city's strong anti-union sentiment, which coincided with the increasing conservatism of the NLRB. Despite the lack of sympathy for the Steelworkers, the CIO's non-compliance with the anti-communist loyalty oath of Taft-Hartley caused the most problems for the union in the courts. While Steelworker and CIO officials declared that the loyalty oath was unconstitutional and violated their civil rights, their ultimate non-compliance hindered their organizing efforts at NashCo.

November 1947: State Court Intervention, NashCo attacks

Following the August NLRB election, tensions between the Steelworkers and NashCo began to mount as the conflict between them continued through November. The Steelworkers were frustrated with NashCo's unwillingness to bargain. They felt that management was avoiding the real issue of wages and working conditions by hiding behind Taft-Hartley. The Steelworkers attacked NashCo's 83 cent per hour average wage, comparing it to the average \$1.03 per hour in Birmingham, and the average \$1.78 per hour wage that the CIO had successfully extracted from Vultee management in Philadelphia.¹⁰² Charles Cox, local president of the Steelworkers, angrily told the *Banner*, "we are fed up with delays...we have offered our proposals to Vultee management in good faith as representatives of an overwhelming majority. No action whatsoever has been taken by the company. If we cannot get cooperation and immediately, then there is nothing to do but shut the plant down."¹⁰³ The CIO believed that their NLRB victory was enough verification to allow NashCo to deal with the Steelworkers; had the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 95.

¹⁰² "Vultee Workers Vote to Strike: Date of Walkout Left to CIO Officials: 2000 Employees Involved," *Tennessean*. 8 November 1947, p. 4.

Machinists' February contract been valid, they reasoned, the election would not have taken place. In contrast, NashCo felt that only certification from the Board would justify their bargaining with the Steelworkers, who failed to be certified under the conditions required by Taft-Hartley.

Given management's unwillingness to bargain with the Steelworkers, the union met on November 7 to vote on whether to strike. Due to the number of Steelworker layoffs in mid-September, far fewer workers attended the meeting. Approximately four hundred members voted 388 to 12 to walk off the job. The following day, the Steelworkers began to strike. Between 25-30 picketers gathered around the five entrances of the plant, while approximately 1,000 to 1,300 people stayed out of NashCo. With the initiation of the walkout, management reiterated their contention to the *Tennessean* that the strike was illegal, claiming that the company was "caught in a jurisdictional fight between two rival unions."¹⁰⁴ Had this claim been legitimate, the company would have removed itself from the dispute. Instead, NashCo officials filed for an injunction against the Steelworkers in Chancellor William Wade's Chancery Court.

NashCo attorney William Waller argued in the local press that the strike began because "out-of-town" union officials wanted to "demonstra[te] [their] dissatisfaction with the provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act."¹⁰⁵ True, the CIO was interested in the NashCo case because it was one of the first labor disputes tested under Taft-Hartley. However, Waller's assumption ignored the fact that the strike was a result of worker resentment directed towards the company and the Machinists. Waller also accused the Steelworkers of mass picketing on November 10, a

¹⁰³ "Injunction Against Vultee Strikers Sought as More Violence Threatened: Morning Disorder Brings 3 Arrests; 1,000 Block Gates." *Banner*. 10 November 1947. p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Wayne Whitt, "Court Limits Vultee Pickets, Strikers Ring Plant Again Today: New Strife Seen: Injunction to Curb Numbers May Be Ignored as CIO Heads Issue Call to Report at 6:30 AM." *Tennessean*. 10 November 1947, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Wayne Whitt, "Injunction to Curb Numbers May Be Ignored as CIO Heads Issue Call to Report at 6:30 AM." *Tennessean*, 11 November 1947, p. 2.

violation of Taft-Hartley, because it was accompanied by “violence, intimidation and coercion.”¹⁰⁶ In response, William Crawford, district director of the CIO, bitterly complained to the *Banner* that NashCo attorneys “deliberately misrepresented the facts, and [their] attempts to make our strike appear illegal—when it most certainly is not—is a deliberate subterfuge to evade the real issue [of wages] in this strike.”¹⁰⁷

Wade granted NashCo a temporary injunction, restricting the number of picketers to twelve, and ruled that strikers could picket in groups of two, which prohibited them from coming within fifty feet of each other. NashCo attorneys asked that picketers be limited to six and remain ten feet away from other strikers after they were denied their request to prohibit all picketing, yet Judge Wade also denied the motion. Besides limiting the number of picketers, Judge Wade prohibited the Steelworkers from “block[ing] the use of any public or private road or railroad track leading to or from [the] complainants’ premise or to interfere in any way with free passage of persons and vehicles to or from [the] complainants plant or premise.”¹⁰⁸ The injunction also prevented strikers from interfering with the delivery of supplies to the plant by any mode of transportation and prohibited the use of force or coercion by the Steelworkers. By limiting the number of picketers and placing restrictions on how the Steelworkers could picket, Wade’s ruling impaired the effectiveness of the strike. In effect, his decision revealed the tremendous power the business community had in counteracting challenges to their control over labor in Nashville. Moreover, Wade’s decision pointed to how business boosters in Nashville saw labor strikes as a cause of social instability, which hindered economic growth because it halted production. Patrolmen at the plant issued the injunction to picketers on November 10

¹⁰⁶ Wayne Whitt, “Court Shifts for Strikers Set: CIO Wants U.S. to Act in Vultee Injunction Case: Taft-Hartley Law Test Promised in Union Attack on Picket Curb Order: State Highway Patrol at Plant Reduced.” *Tennessean*. 14 November 1947, p. 14.

because Steelworker's leaders, namely Charles Cox, Philip Clowes, and Arnold Campo, were not present. Upon issuing Wade's order, approximately thirty picketers remained at the plant, violating the injunction.

After Judge Wade's ruling, George Hastings reiterated management's assertion that their contract with the Machinists was valid until February 11, 1948, as well as their willingness to negotiate with any labor union certified by the NLRB. However, the only union certified to bargain with the company were the Machinists, whom management knew they could manipulate. Philip Clowes ridiculed Hasting's comment, contending that if the Steelworkers complied with Taft-Hartley, it would take several months before they were certified by the NLRB, which would not only erode their support at the plant, but "the company would continue to operate under its cheap labor which is deplorable."¹⁰⁹

In addition to the state injunction, NashCo petitioned the NLRB, accusing the Steelworkers of unfair labor practices. The Board's strict adherence to Taft-Hartley in an environment increasingly hostile to unions, placed management on an even playing field with the Steelworkers, and enabled NashCo to appeal to the NLRB with some expectation that the Board would side with management. NashCo asked the Board to seek an injunction against the Steelworkers because they violated section 303-A of Taft-Hartley by forcing management into negotiations with them. The company argued that because the NLRB did not certify the Steelworkers, management still recognized the Machinists as the official bargaining agent. Company officials told the *Banner* that "a union which engages in or encourages employees to

¹⁰⁷ "250 Enter Vultee Plant Under Guard: Strike Scene Quiet as Next Shift Time Nears," *Banner*, 11 November 1947, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ "Injunction To Curb Numbers," p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

engage in strikes and boycotts of these kinds is guilty of an unfair labor practice.”¹¹⁰ However, this was only true in the case of a jurisdictional dispute between two unions, which was questionable because the Board granted the August election. In response to NashCo’s appeal, the Tenth District Regional Director of the NLRB, Paul Styles, claimed that certification by the Board was not a pre-requisite for collective bargaining. The Steelworkers cheered Styles’ clarification. Arnold Campo, an international representative of the CIO, triumphantly declared: “Vultee management is out on a limb and the limb has been cut off. Now maybe the company will come down to earth and face the facts.”¹¹¹ George Hastings, however, disputed Styles’ clarification. Under Taft-Hartley, he argued, a jurisdictional dispute between two unions (which NashCo believed was the case), justified an appeal to the NLRB to have the matter settled. Given Machinist leadership’s desire to maintain their role at the plant, they agreed with NashCo, alleging that the Board made three mistakes in the past year of the dispute. First, it had granted the election, which they maintained was invalid because the February 11 contract they signed with the company preemptively barred the Steelworkers from calling for a new election. Second, it had set the date of the election 60 hours before Taft-Hartley became active. Had the election taken place later, the Machinists claimed, they could have exploited the CIO’s non-compliance with the anti-communist clause. Finally, the Board failed to act on the Machinists’ petition to declare the election invalid, which also would have precluded Steelworker representation at the plant.¹¹² The Machinists also ridiculed the strike, contending that the Steelworkers’ ten-point program was “an untruth, and a smokescreen to cover up the sinister intent of the radical CIO leadership who is merely foisting upon the good citizens of Nashville its policy of terrorism and

¹¹⁰ “Vultee Asks NLRB Force Strike Halt: Firm Seeks Court Order to End All Picketing,” *Banner*, 12 November 1947, p. 1.

¹¹¹ Danny Bingham, “NLRB Role in Strike Clarified,” *Banner*, 13 November 1947, p. 10.

‘ruin or rule.’”¹¹³ The Machinists’ proclamations were only propaganda; there was no smokescreen. However, their attacks reveal the antagonism between the two unions and exposes Machinist leadership’s fear that the Steelworkers undermined their sense of security. More importantly, in a nation that was growing increasingly apprehensive about leftist ideology, the Machinists effectively linked union militancy to subversive communist activities, or the Steelworkers’ “sinister intent.” In this respect, by subverting the issue of worker grievances and pigeonholing the CIO as communistic, the Machinists attempted to persuade workers to turn against the CIO. In response, the Steelworkers asserted that the Machinists “had taken an anti-labor attitude and [had] become a glorified company organ” in attempts to reassert themselves as an organization independent of company domination.

Because of a series of violent altercations between picketers and non-strikers on November 18, NashCo attorneys went to court to petition for the prohibition of all picketing at the plant. In response, CIO attorneys Reuben Brazell of Nashville and Jerome Cooper of Birmingham filed for a transfer from state to federal court on November 14 under District Judge Elmer Davies. Brazell and Cooper contended that because the dispute was over federal legislation, it should be remanded to federal court. In effect, Brazell and Cooper hoped that a federal court, relatively autonomous from the influence of the Nashville business elite, would be more sympathetic to the union’s case. Using the Norris-LaGuardia Act, which prevented federal courts from interfering with peaceful picketing, CIO attorneys argued that the act “did not take away jurisdiction [of the state courts] over the cause, but merely set out definite allegations the

¹¹² “NLRB to Probe CIO Walkout at Vultee On ‘Unfair Charge’: District Chief Declares IAM Status Unsettled; New Controversy Arises Over CIO Certification,” *Tennessean*, 13 November 1947, p. 1.

¹¹³ Danny Bingham, “CIO Threatens Railroad Shop Campaign: Showdown With IAM in Vultee Strike Cited.” *Banner*, 24 November 1947, p. 2.

company must aver before the federal court [could] grant injunctions.”¹¹⁴ Alternatively, William Waller argued that not only did Norris-LaGuardia usurp the power of state courts, but the Steelworkers had instigated mass picketing and violence. Consequently, the dispute should be relegated to state control because state law enforcement officials could effectively control it. Davies, however, ruled against the Steelworkers, concluding that NashCo would have suffered greater damages than the union in the absence of the injunction because patrolmen provided insufficient protection at the plant, and therefore returned the case to Chancery Court.¹¹⁵ The Steelworker’s use of Norris-LaGuardia was dubious because it was questionable that they were peacefully picketing given the outbreaks of violence. Nevertheless, Davies’ contention that the company would have incurred greater damages in the absence of the injunction appeared weak because of the presence of the state patrol to maintain order.

On November 20, the NLRB rejected the CIO’s request for certification because it had failed to comply with the anti-communist affidavit. In case “someone [would] attempt to ballyhoo this meaningless ruling as a victory,” the Steelworkers issued a statement to the *Tennessean*, admitting that they knew their request for certification would be rejected.¹¹⁶ The CIO declared that the ruling would have no effect on the strike because they believed their victory in the August election proved that they represented the majority of workers. Arnold Campo told the *Tennessean* that “our offer to bargain has nothing to do with certification. Our position, and the fact upon which we base our fight is simply that the employees of Vultee voted two to one for USA-CIO in a democratic election.”¹¹⁷ Philip Murray complained that the NLRB ruling provided a legal loophole that NashCo could use to avoid bargaining with the

¹¹⁴ “Court Remands Strike Dispute: U.S. Judge Refuses to take Jurisdiction Over Vultee Litigation,” *Tennessean*, 22 November 1947, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ “NLRB Rejects CIO’s Request For Certification,” *Tennessean*, 20 November 1947, p. 2.

Steelworkers. He bitterly remarked that “the Board [should] not intend to permit itself to be manipulated as an instrument for aiding a company that has flagrantly denied its employees the right to bargain for the better standard of living, higher wages, and improved working conditions through a union of their own choice.”¹¹⁸ In contrast, Guy Matlock, spokesman for the Machinists, praised the ruling. “It leaves the CIO out in the cold,” he declared because it negated the August election, thereby solidifying the Machinist’s argument that they were the collective bargainer at the plant, and reaffirming their opinion that the February contract was valid.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the Machinists translated the ruling in a broader context, explaining that the CIO “has no standing before the NLRB by deliberately defying the laws of the U.S.” because of their refusal to sign the anti-communist loyalty oath.¹²⁰

December 1947: Increasingly Troubled Legal Problems

As violence and vandalism among picketers intensified, the Steelworkers became further embroiled in bureaucratic and jurisdictional disputes with NashCo and the Machinists. After the Steelworkers failure to transfer the case to federal court, NashCo again attempted to obtain an injunction that would push picketers back 500 yards from the plant. Brazell angrily referred to Waller’s scheme as “unconstitutional and bordering on police state tactics.”¹²¹ The presence of the state patrol had contained violence to a certain degree and NashCo’s petition seemed excessive. Moreover, the broadened injunction interfered with picketers’ rights to express their discontent with management, thereby weakening the Steelworkers’ support by placing further restrictions on them. Judge Wade sided with the Steelworkers in early December, and extended

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ “Drop Vultee Pleas CIO Head Urges, Murray Denies Strike Violates labor Act: Sees ‘No Alternative’.” *Tennessean*, 27 November 1947, p. 1.

¹¹⁹ “NLRB Rejects CIO’s Request for Certification,” p. 4.

the number of picketers to 20. Wade stipulated, however, that picketers were to remain at least 100 yards away from the plant. Wade's ruling was interesting because state judges often tended to favor business. True, picketers were pushed back from the plant. However, by extending the number of picketers, it appeared that Wade was interested in protecting the rights of both labor and business. What seemed to be a small victory for the Steelworkers was circumvented the same day when the NLRB ruled that any union that did not comply with the anti-communist clause of Taft-Hartley could not get on the ballot in a firm even if the company requested an election. The ruling foreshadowed the mounting problems the Steelworkers were to have with NashCo because even if a new election was called, as long as the union refused to comply with Taft-Hartley, they would not be allowed on the ballot.

At the same time, the Steelworkers decided to attack the state patrol because their excessive use of force and tactics of intimidation, which incited violence among picketers. When State Commissioner of Safety, Lynn Bomar arrested several strikers after cutting down a sign the Steelworkers had legally posted, the union decided to take legal action. On December 10, CIO attorneys filed for a federal court injunction against Bomar, accusing him and his men of violating federal civil rights laws. The Steelworkers claimed that Bomar interfered with their right to peacefully picket by "entering into an unlawful plan of conspiracy to deny the plaintiffs the rights, privileges, and immunities guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States."¹²² While the state patrol did not overtly conspire with the company, it was clear that they took a pro-NashCo stance towards the strike, while violating the civil rights of picketers. In response, non-strikers issued a statement to Governor McCord, praising the actions of Bomar and his men.

¹²⁰ "IAM Declares Contract Valid at Vultee," *Banner*, 17 December 1947, p. 22.

¹²¹ "Vultee to Ask Court to Halt Picketing," *Tennessean*, 23 November 1947, p. 4.

¹²² Danny Bingham, "CIO Cut Sign Down, 3 Arrested; Union Files Suit Against Bomar," *Banner*, 11 December 1947, p. 1.

They pleaded with Governor McCord that “this protection not be denied to us until the strike issues have been settled and until acts of violence, terrorism, and vandalism in our city have been stamped out.”¹²³ Interestingly, the majority of people who signed the petition were office employees, whom picketers allowed to enter the plant freely.

On December 12, the NLRB refused to issue a complaint against the Steelworkers on behalf of NashCo, who in November had accused the CIO of unfair labor practices. General Counsel Robert Denham’s ruling denied the injunction, but was vague in clarifying which union was the legal collective bargainer. The *New York Times* noted its ambiguity, declaring that “Mr. Denham [has] left the problem to the parties themselves” which only complicated the Steelworkers’ legal quandaries.¹²⁴ Denham ruled that the Machinists had been certified as the collective bargainer by the Board in 1940, a point that the Steelworkers argued did not occur because it would have validated their August victory. However, Denham also concluded that “while the election of August 20, 1947 has not been made conclusive by reason of the closing of the case due to non-compliance of the Steelworkers, the vote of 903 for Steelworkers against 464 for IAM is persuasive contrary evidence which cannot be ignored.”¹²⁵ The NLRB had to comply with the conditions of Taft-Hartley, and Denham’s conservatism contributed to the Board’s strict adherence to the law. However, it seemed that worker resentment of the company’s tactics of intimidation and manipulation, reflected in the Steelworkers’ landslide victory in August, did not go unnoticed. Therefore, whether intentional or not, the vague language of the ruling provided a legal loophole for the union to gain representation without going through the NLRB.

¹²³“Guard Group Attacked: Train Halted At Vultee,” *Banner*. 18 December 1947, p. 1.

¹²⁴ Joseph A. Loftus, “Denham Denies Aid to Nashville Firm, Says Murray Union. on Strike. Won Bargaining Poll Even Though Rival Has Contract.” *New York Times*. 14 December 1947, p. 65.

¹²⁵ Robert N. Denham to Charles Cox, President of Local 4057, 12 December 1947 in Operation Dixie. Series 3. Reel #51, Univ. of Virginia. * Va.

In response to the ruling, W.R. Lawrence, general manager of NashCo, noted that Denham's ruling would not change the company's opinion that the strike was illegal. The ruling only meant, he explained, that the NLRB "would not take jurisdiction over the case."¹²⁶ In contrast, Clowes told the *Banner* that the company was "morally bound to bargain with us, and morally bound to honor the democratic voices of its employees."¹²⁷ Behind the scenes, however, CIO organizers were less optimistic. In a memo to Christopher, Krainock sadly remarked, "situation reaches crisis...Denham's decision is out. 1300 people back in [the] plant-there you have it...Van B. (Bittner) doesn't know the situation. No one from here...has reported directly to him the true figures."¹²⁸ Ironically, while Denham's decision did not rule out the possibility of the Steelworker's claim of representation, its vagueness weakened the union's support among workers because it validated the Machinist's role at the plant before the August election.

During this time, the Machinists and the Steelworkers exchanged a series of verbal attacks. Following Denham's decision, Harry Summers declared that "the CIO has made [the] statement that the [February] contract is illegal, but this is merely a continuation of the CIO's tactics to confuse the minds of the public as well as the employees of the plant."¹²⁹ However, the NLRB had invalidated the February contract, and while Denham's decision verified Local 735's role in the plant before August, it did not rule that the contract was legal. In response, Charles Cox remarked that the statement "sounded like it was written by company officials or their lawyers...it is obviously the work of a company stooge, and a disgrace to the American Labor movement."¹³⁰ Moreover, the Steelworkers claimed the Machinists "sold out employees, lock-

¹²⁶ "Vultee Denies Union's Claim NLRB Ruling Affects Strike." *Banner*, 13 December 1947, p. 1.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Louis Krainock to Paul Christopher. n.d. in Operation Dixie, Series 3, Reel #51. Univ. of Virginia. *Va.

¹²⁹ "Vultee Denies Claim," p. 1.

¹³⁰ "Guard Group Attacked," p. 2.

stock and barrel to company domination."¹³¹ Despite its problems with NashCo, the Machinists' continual association with the company reinforced the idea that they were not interested in pursuing the issues of worker solidarity, job advancement, and involvement in management decisions. Rather, its leadership was concerned with maintaining its sense of security, which had been disrupted by the Steelworkers. Guy Matlock responded to Cox's accusations by accusing the Steelworkers of union raiding, claiming that the reason why workers remained on strike was "their fear of union violence rather than sympathy with the strike."¹³² However, Matlock's claim that workers stayed out on strike over fear of violence was unpersuasive. The violence associated with the strike had not escalated to the point that it did in late December. In addition, the number of heavily armed state patrolmen guaranteed non-strikers access to the plant, revealing that the real reason why workers stayed out on strike was their dissatisfaction with the company and Machinist leadership.

January-March 1948: The Fall of the Steelworkers

As the violence associated with the strike began to recede, the bureaucratic and legal disputes between the three parties became increasingly messy. In early January, Governor McCord was called upon by picketers to "halt illegal, unwarranted and viscous misuse of the highway patrol" by removing them from the strike.¹³³ Bomar, who reduced the number of patrolmen from 36 to 6 around the plant in November, increased the number of patrolmen with heightened violence in December. The State Safety Commissioner denied violating the civil rights of picketers when he testified before Judge Davies's federal court in late December and

¹³¹ "NLRB Ruling Comforts Both Sides," *Tennessean*. 14 December 1947, p 19.

¹³² "Both NashCo Unions Say 'You're to Blame.'" *Tennessean*. 18 December 1947, p. 18.

¹³³ "Grand Jury to Probe Blast: NashCo Investigation Ordered by Gilbert; In Charge of Group," *Tennessean*, 6 January 1948, p. 3.

early January. He claimed that in one instance his life had been threatened after an informant told a city official that picketers had “plans to bring some hoodlum down from Chicago or elsewhere, bump Bomar off and be gone.”¹³⁴ While the threat on Bomar’s life was unconvincing, it pointed to the fact that he saw the Steelworkers as “outsiders,” who had come to Nashville to incite violence.

The Steelworkers in their petition, criticized Bomar’s use of sub-machine guns as a method of intimidation. However, picketers did not disagree with the state patrol’s presence. Charles Cox told the *Banner*: “Mr. Bomar does enforce the law, but sometimes I think he goes a little too far. I think he could have talked instead of arresting and accomplished the same end.”¹³⁵ In his defense, Bomar explained that sub-machine guns were a standard piece of equipment for patrolmen and only used for self-defense. When a question concerning unarmed picketers was raised, Bomar remarked that “a machine gun has a good influence in keeping order among the strikers,” claiming that he had no problem “fight[ing] fire with fire.”¹³⁶ Nevertheless, Bomar’s use of machine guns against picketers and the state patrol’s acts of intimidation seemed excessive given that picketers were not armed. His dislike of the Steelworkers was so apparent that on January 15, Reuben Brazell attempted to obtain a warrant for Bomar after the Safety Commissioner threatened him, but his request was denied by Judge Davies. True, picketers were involved in a series of violent acts. However, it is questionable whether the violence would have escalated to such a degree in the absence of the state patrol’s excessive use of force. Ultimately, Davies denied the Steelworker’s request for a federal injunction because “one or two instances of civil rights violations could hamper the efforts of

¹³⁴“Bomar Told of ‘Threat on His Life’,” *Banner*, 18 December 1947, p.1

¹³⁵“Danny Bingham, “Bomar Defense In Injunction Case Set Jan 9.” *Banner*, 20 December 1947. p. 1-2.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

lawfully constituted officials to preserve the peace and administer the duties of their office.”¹³⁷

Davies referred to the case as the “pot calling the kettle black,” noting that while Bomar and his men were over-enthusiastic, their presence prevented further recurrences of violence. In response to the use of sub-machine guns, Davies agreed with their use, asking, “what can one man do against such a number even if they are not armed?”¹³⁸ Interestingly, while federal courts tended to be more sympathetic towards labor, it was clear that Davies sided with the company, and overlooked violations of civil rights. Similar to the local business elites, whom Davies often interacted with, it appeared that Davies might have linked economic growth to political and social stability. In this respect, picketers caused social instability in Nashville by inciting violence. In turn, this halted production at the plant and threatened Nashville as a whole because prosperity for members of the business elite, translated into economic growth for the community, thereby justifying Bomar’s actions to preserve the status quo.

As more workers returned to NashCo, or sought new jobs elsewhere because the company filled positions with replacement workers, the strike became ineffective. Consequently, on February 23 approximately 450 strikers, in a 5 to 1 vote, agreed to call off the strike. Picketers who held out to the very end attempted to get their jobs back at the plant and the CIO claimed that NashCo was required to do so. However, management explained that because the plant was operating at full capacity, re-employment of strikers would only be considered on an individual basis. W.R. Lawrence declared that “no employee [would] be discharged or laid off to make way for returning strikers.”¹³⁹ This strategy helped the company reestablish control

¹³⁷ “Judge Denies CIO Injunction Curbing Bomar: Agrees Strikers Civil Rights Violated, But Contends Instances Isolated; Hearing Today on Picketing Ruling,” *Tennessean*, 20 January 1948, p. 1.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ “Few Strikers Expected to Regain Jobs at Vultee,” *Banner*, 23 February 1948, p. 1.

over workers because it ensured that the Steelworkers could not re-institute any attempts to organize the plant.

Contributing to the Steelworkers' decision to call off the strike was a case being decided in the State Supreme Court concerning Tennessee's anti-closed shop law, which was decided a week after the strike was called off. In *Mascari v. International Brotherhood of Teamsters*, the Tennessee State Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of the state's "right-to-work" law. The Teamsters had argued that Taft-Hartley's anti-closed shop law violated an individual's first and fourteenth amendment, and was aimed directly at unions in order to weaken their bargaining power vis-à-vis management. However, the court unanimously decided against the union, declaring that the law "does not attempt to interfere with employees or...[their right] to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing. The act...is designed to protect non-union workers against loss of jobs or employment on account of their failure to join a union."¹⁴⁰ With respect to NashCo, had the Steelworkers decided to continue the strike, the *Mascari* decision would have prevented them from having a closed shop at the plant. Moreover, given the fact that support for the Steelworkers was dwindling among picketers, and non-strikers saw the union as antagonistic, it is doubtful that an open Steelworkers' shop would have attained its original ten-point list of demands. Instead, the Steelworkers might have faced the same problems the Machinists had before 1947, and could have suffered from company domination.

In mid January, individual Steelworkers petitioned the NLRB, accusing NashCo of unfair labor practices because the firm retained its contract with the Machinist's despite the Steelworker's victory in the August election. However, on March 6, the Board refused to bring charges against the company because it terminated its contract with the Machinists on January 23. Subsequently, "having ceased to recognize or re-enter into a contract with IAM...[NashCo]

present[ed] no violation of [Taft-Hartley].”¹⁴¹ Philip Clowes claimed that the ruling was based on a “misstatement of fact” because on February 10, the day before the Machinist’s contract expired, NashCo management indefinitely extended its contract with the union while they negotiated a new one.¹⁴² Consequently, the Steelworkers argued that because the company still had a contract with the Machinists, they were guilty of unfair labor practices.

April 1948: Machinists Victory?

On April 8, the NLRB denied the Steelworkers the right to be on the ballot at NashCo. On January 23, two days after NashCo had ended its contract with the Machinists; its leaders filed a petition with the NLRB, calling for a new election at the plant. The petition contained 30 percent of the workforce’s signatures, revealing that support for the union was not as strong as the Machinists had led the public to believe. Harry Summers told the *Tennessean* in January that the Machinists called for a new election to “clear away any and all of the legal technicalities and phraseology contained in the Taft-Hartley law surrounding the case, and to assure...members of the IAM [and] the public of Nashville that the [union]...ha[d] always been a law-abiding organization.”¹⁴³ The preemptive cancellation of the Machinist’s contract with the company not only enabled NashCo to avoid the Steelworkers’ accusations of unfair labor practices, but also allowed the Machinists to appeal to the NLRB to call for a new election so the Steelworkers could not block the petition. At the same time, Summers condemned the Steelworkers, declaring that “[they] have screamed about their freedom and their constitutional rights. The Steelworkers are as free as any other organization to comply with the provisions of Taft-Hartley. The[y] alone

¹⁴⁰ *Mascari v. International Brotherhood of Teamsters*, 333. U.S. 907, 69 S. Ct. 410. 93 (28 February 1948).

¹⁴¹ “CIO Representatives Flays NLRB NashCo Case Ruling.” *Tennessean*, 7 March 1948. p. 7B.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

are responsible for the deplorable conditions that have existed in Nashville since the beginning of this strike.”¹⁴⁴ On January 29, the regional NLRB held a hearing for the Machinist’s request. The Steelworkers argued that under the conditions of Taft-Hartley, the election in August prevented the Machinists from holding a new election until the following year. NLRB officials did not allow the Steelworkers to interfere with the hearing for “general purposes” because they had not signed the anti-communist loyalty oath. Frank J. Donner, assistant general council of the Steelworkers, asked permission at the hearing to argue the union’s position before the Board, but his request was denied. Furthermore, the NLRB did not allow 600 Steelworkers to protests their objections at the hearing because they were not viewed as a coherent labor organization.

Based on the statement of facts at the hearing, the NLRB ruled unanimously in favor of the Machinists on April 18, permitting them to hold an election on April 30 in which the Steelworkers would not be on the ballot. The Board ruled that the August 20 election was invalid because the Steelworkers failed to comply with the anti-communist affidavit. Consequently, the Machinists could call for a new election. The NLRB also ruled that the Steelworkers should not have been present at the January hearing. However, it allowed 140 employees who were discharged by the company to vote in the upcoming election, but required that their votes be set aside and only used if they determined the results of the election. In protest, the Steelworkers renewed its attack on NashCo and the Machinists, distributing pamphlets throughout the plant, telling workers that their “democratic will [had] been deliberately taken from [them].”¹⁴⁵ Steelworker organizer Courtney Shill called the ruling “an outrage, apparently the whole democratic process has gone up the flue.” declaring that the policy

¹⁴³ “CIO to Fight NLRB Ruling for NashCo Charges Dropped; Union to Appeal Action in Capital,” *Tennessean*, 22 January 1948, p. 3.

¹⁴⁴ Danny Bingham, “NLRB Voids Vultee Strikers’ Charges: Hearing Set On Tuesday on IAM Request for Election.” *Banner*, 21 January 1948, p. 2.

would “destroy trade unionism.”¹⁴⁶ However, the Steelworkers’ attacks were to little too late. Ultimately, because the NLRB strictly adhered to Taft-Hartley, the CIO’s non-compliance led to its failure to be on the ballot. W.R. Lawrence responded that the company hoped that “the coming election [would] result in more satisfactory conditions for both the company and workers. The company of course cannot take an interest in the election, but I hope this will eliminate disorders [that] have occurred in the past.”¹⁴⁷ Because the Steelworkers were excluded from the ballot, the result of the election did not matter, and management would be able to reassert its control over workers. Guy Matlock declared the decision “a great victory for the union, and for law, order and decency” and that “we want[ed] to get the best pay possible and we want to work under ideal conditions, but we [could not] under duress, chaos and confusion.”¹⁴⁸

Several days before the election, the Machinists submitted their demands to NashCo. They asked for a general 30 cent per hour wage hike, raising the top wage to \$2.07 per hour, seven paid holidays per year, double-time for holidays worked, and four days of sick leave for employees who worked at least a year at the company. The Machinists also asked that employees be granted after one year a “pro-rata” vacation where one day for each month worked would be added to an individual’s vacation. They also requested life and medical insurance, including disability without cost to the employee, and that national and state guards be granted leaves, with NashCo paying the difference between the two wages. The Machinists’ demands seemed strikingly similar to the Steelworker’s ten-point program. Had the Steelworkers’ push

¹⁴⁵ Danny Bingham, “Vultee Union Vote Expected Next Week.” *Banner*, 19 April 1948. p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ “Labor Election At General Shoe Voided By NLRB: Charges Jarmon’s ‘Intemperate Talk’ Other Action Prevented Free Vote: NashCo Winds Rounds Against USW.” *Tennessean*. 19 April 1948, p. 1.

¹⁴⁷ “Auto Workers Threatens Strike; NLRB Rules Out NashCo Union: Steelers Lose Bargain Rights; New Election Set,” *Tennessean*. 18 April 1948, p. 4.

¹⁴⁸ Wayne Whitt, “Workers Favor IAM at NashCo: Machinist Union Wins By 10 to 1 in Election Conducted By NLRB.” *Tennessean*, 1 May 1948. p. 2.

for unionization not occurred at NashCo, the Machinists would not have asked for such concessions given its humiliating defeat by management in 1946.

However, the Machinists' demands were also very different from the Steelworkers. The wage increase did not protect against wage reductions, there were no shift premiums, vacation time was shorter, and the union asked for fewer benefits. More importantly, the CIO's ten-point program had called for the union to have a say in how the company was run. This was reflected in their demand for reclassification through a joint union-management program that would classify jobs, which was a source of resentment for workers at the plant. In contrast, the Machinists' program did not address this issue. Rather, the union's demands did not circumvent the tie of dependency between themselves and the company as the Steelworkers' ten-point program offered to do. The Machinists' demands could be acquired through the amicable relationship between the union and management. Moreover, they could easily be taken away from workers if management felt that the Machinists violated this relationship by challenging company power.

On April 30, the NLRB election was held. The result was a 10 to 1 vote of 968 votes for the Machinists and 94 votes in favor of no union (300 eligible workers did not vote). Louis Krainock in a letter to Paul Christopher remorsefully confided, "the result of this election was somewhat surprising, we expected the IAM to win, but we did expect more NO union votes."¹⁴⁹ Krainock attributed the Machinist's victory to the 700 replacement workers that were hired during the strike, which added to the 464 votes the Machinists had originally received in the August election. He contended that workers voted for the Machinists because they feared that the strikers would come back and take their jobs, despite Lawrence's declaration that the rehiring

¹⁴⁹ Louis Krainock to Paul R. Christopher, 2 May 1948 in AFL-CIO Region 8 1 Folder, 1874 Box Louis Krainock-Area Director 1947, SLA.

of picketers would only be considered on an individual basis. The 700 replacement workers did help contribute to the landslide victory of the Machinists. However, the violence on the part of picketers and the CIO's unwillingness to comply with Taft-Hartley were also important factors. True, Machinist leadership did not have the best record in addressing workers' grievances. However, they ensured that a certain portion of the workforce was represented, which for 968 employees was better than no union at all. Two weeks later, after the Machinists were certified by the NLRB, they accepted by an overwhelming majority, a contract negotiated with management. While the union gained several small concessions, the agreement ensured that workers would remain dependent on management. The contract included a 5 to 34 cent raise, averaging 18-20 cents, with the top wage being \$1.78 and the minimum wage being 88 cents per hour, which was based on NashCo's regional survey of wage rates. The agreement did ensure a wage increase for all employees; however, the lack of a general wage hike helped divide the workforce by compensating skilled workers to a larger degree. In addition, the Machinists also received six days of paid holidays and two weeks vacation. While the contract allowed negotiations to take place between the two parties for the duration of the two-year contract, it contained a "no-strike, no lockout" clause, which prevented workers from going on strike when they were at a stalemate with management. The clause also thwarted any attempts by the company to lockout workers if the union decided to go on strike, which was a common tactic among Nashville businessmen.¹⁵⁰ For the Machinists, the "no-strike, no lockout" clause provided for mediation because it preserved their bargaining unit. In contrast, for management, the clause served as a means of binding arbitration because if the Machinists went on strike, the company could appeal to the NLRB with some justification.

¹⁵⁰ Danny Bingham, "NashCo, IAM Agree on New Work Contract," *Banner*, 11 June 1948, p. 6.

Conclusion

Clearly, Taft-Hartley served as a means to an end for NashCo management. Company attorneys capitalized on the conservative legislation, successfully defeating the Steelworkers. The company found a sympathetic ear in state and federal courts. Moreover, the manner in which the company pursued the dispute is significant. Rather than engage in a verbal assault with Steelworker officials, NashCo fought the union with the legal weapons provided by Taft-Hartley. Consequently, when the strike ended the company emerged from the dispute unscathed compared to the Steelworkers, who were condemned by the Machinists for following a policy of terrorism and "ruin or rule" tactics and ridiculed by the local newspapers for instituting a "campaign of lawlessness." NashCo officials relied on the Machinists to promote the dispute as solely a jurisdictional quarrel between two unions. As a result, when the Machinists won the April 30 election, the company was able to resume relations with Local 735, granting them several concessions, including the "no-strike, no lockout" clause, which also worked to the union's disadvantage because it disallowed them the right to express their discontent with labor-management relations by striking.

Historian Robert Spinney argues that the NLRB's inability to process NashCo and the Steelworkers' petitions quickly helped contribute to the CIO's ultimate failure. This was a mitigating factor, but most importantly was the implementation of Taft-Hartley. While the Board's ambiguous ruling on December 12 provided some leeway for the Steelworkers to argue that they were the legal collective bargainer, it became apparent, as the nation became increasingly conservative with the onslaught of the Cold War, that the NLRB would strictly adhere to the provisions of Taft-Hartley. The CIO's non-compliance with the anti-communist loyalty oath also caused problems for the union because it prevented the NLRB from certifying

the Steelworkers and the August 20 election. Furthermore, the acts of violence on the part of picketers contributed to the loss of legitimacy in the eyes of the Board, which helped negate their efforts at NashCo.

With respect to the courts, the violent acts of picketers created doubt for Wade and Davies that the Steelworkers were peacefully picketing. Despite the presence of the state patrol, the injunctions were excessive; revealing that anti-union sentiment was not restricted to Nashville's business elite. In addition, the decision of *Mascari* reveals the ultimate failure of the Steelworkers and the labor movement in Tennessee. Taft-Hartley's remand of "right to work" laws to the state legislature exposed the fact that even if the Steelworkers won representation, any attempts to break workers' sense of dependency on management to provide for economic security would have likely failed because the Steelworkers would not have had the power to mobilize the entire company workforce against management.

Chapter Three: “A Striking Resemblance to Terrorism”

While the company battled Steelworker leaders in the courts, picketers increasingly became involved in acts of violence and vandalism during the 104-day strike. As the dispute dragged on, violence became a central issue, which overshadowed the Steelworkers' cause and the issue of company domination. On December 4, editorial cartoonist John Knox of the *Banner* summed up the sentiment of the Nashville community with respect to the outbreak of violence and vandalism at NashCo with a few strokes of his pen (fig. 1). Not surprisingly, Knox depicted the labor violence unsympathetically. In general the CIO, famous for its militant tactic in the 1930s, had been stereotyped by southern businessmen as violent in attaining representation at a factory, which threatened management's power over workers. The violence that began at NashCo in November and continued through February reinforced this stereotype. However, the violence and acts of sabotage during the strike reveal broader implications for Nashville. In fact, the recurring violence on the part of picketers, Machinists, and the state patrol reveals how violence was a form of protest and a method of control in the strike.

In the case of picketers, violence was used as a means of retaliation because they were frustrated with low wages and the company's unwillingness to bargain. The Steelworkers believed that they were injured by the Machinists' amicable relationship with NashCo, who exploited workers by keeping wages at the plant below national standards. According to Charles Cox, by refusing to deal with the Steelworkers, the company “depriv[ed] [them] of [their] democratic rights by legal sounding evasion.”¹⁵¹ The ongoing legal battles between the company and the Steelworkers in the courts and with the NLRB intensified this frustration. Consequently, violence served as a logical outlet for picketers who could not retaliate in any other way. Furthermore, the violence reveals the inability of strikers to coalesce worker solidarity and class

identity with individualism and their dependent relationship with the company. The Steelworker's unfaltering commitment to worker solidarity was a relatively new concept for workers. The CIO claimed to be a union that fought its members. By setting up grievance committees and demanding to have a say in management decisions, the Steelworkers attempted to give workers a voice in company activities. Workers realized that they did not have to maintain good relations with management in order to gain concessions. Rather, by promoting solidarity, workers realized that they were "in the same boat," which enabled them to mobilize against management. In turn, the company would be forced to meet the union's demands, compelling workers to be more reliant on solidarity within their own class. The problem was that class-consciousness and collectivization ran countercurrent to a class structure that was individualistic and corporatist. Therefore, the violence on the part of the picketers reveals their own grappling with this CIO-constructed class identity and their reaction to the southern establishment, which was personified by the company, the Machinists, and the state patrol.

The Nashville community, reflected in the activities of the state patrol and the Machinists, also used violence as a means of control. These institutions were crucial to the corporatist social structure of Nashville because of their willingness to defer to the Nashville business elite who believed that they represented the interests of the community. The Machinists' reaction to the violence was negative because the Steelworkers threatened the Machinists' sense of security, which was tied to their dependency on management. However, the state patrol's excessive use of force reveals their aversion to the Steelworkers, who were portrayed as "outsiders" who instigated turmoil in the South by creating tensions within the rigid class structure. Thus, in order to maintain control and preserve the status quo, the state patrol reacted violently towards picketers.

¹⁵¹ "Vultee Workers Vote to Strike." p. 2.

November 1947: Tensions Mount Among Strikers

In response to the Steelworker's announcement on November 7 that they would go out on strike, NashCo officials announced that the plant would continue to remain open. Expecting violence at the first shift change on November 9, heavily armed county and state patrolmen gathered around the plant at management's request. The Machinists, claiming that their contract was valid, attempted to prevent workers from going on strike by distributing pamphlets throughout the plant, asking workers to "not deprive [their] family of loss of pay, due to a strike called illegally by the CIO."¹⁵² Antagonism between the two unions was so strong that after the Steelworkers announced that the strike would take place, Machinist leaders urged its members to break the picket lines. Leaders of Local 735 remarked to the *Tennessean* that "there may be some head-cracking but we're going through any lines...we've had our heads cracked before, and we know how to dish it out."¹⁵³ Clearly, Machinist leadership ignored the issue of worker grievances as a mitigating factor in the strike. Instead, they focused on how to maintain their role in the plant, even if it required the use of force.

On November 10, at the first shift change, approximately thirty tool and die workers, believed to be the stronghold of the Machinists, rushed the picket lines, gaining access into the plant. However, the Steelworkers were relatively successful in preventing workers from entering, with the exception of non-union office employees, whom they allowed unfettered access to the plant. Strikers held signs declaring "What for? A Decent Living. I'm walking because I can't afford to ride. Who said...a half loaf is better than none? We want our crumbs, 30 cents an hour and the 10 point program-bread and meat for our kids."¹⁵⁴ Initially, the strike

¹⁵² "CIO Union Votes Vultee Plant Strike," *Tennessean*, 7 November 1947, p. 2.

¹⁵³ "Violence Threatens in Vultee Dispute: IAM Vows it Will Ignore CIO Pickets; Guards Ready If Strike Starts Today," *Tennessean*, 9 November 1947, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ Whitt, "Court Limits Vultee Pickets," p.2.

lacked any tension among picketers. *Banner* reporter Danny Bingham described strikers as being “good-natured, but determined.”¹⁵⁵ Arnold Campo remarked to the *Tennessean* that the strike was “very effective...and would continue until the company agrees to bargain with our union.”¹⁵⁶ While Machinist leadership sanctioned violence as a means of gaining access to the plant, CIO leaders were in opposition to the use of force among picketers. Campo denied the possibility of violence on the part of the Steelworkers, declaring that “it’s the others who are talking about violence...we’re not.”¹⁵⁷ CIO organizers knew that their reputation in the South was that they were violent and radical. Therefore, if the union committed itself to peaceful picketing, it could avoid being radicalized in the eyes of the community. Despite this commitment, however, the Steelworkers immediately became involved in acts of sabotage and violence, continuing throughout the strike’s duration.

Davidson County patrolmen who were present on the scene remarked to the *Tennessean* that strikers had rushed the gates early that morning, declaring that “it looked like a cat and dog fight more than anything else,” resulting in the arrest of several picketers.¹⁵⁸ Among those arrested was a female striker, charged with petty larceny after a clerical employee accused her of stealing her bag. The striker proclaimed her innocence, declaring that she only wanted a 30-cent raise to help her daughter out in high school.¹⁵⁹ While the striker’s arrest appears insignificant, it revealed picketers’ frustrations with non-strikers and a company that kept wages so low that a striker could not effectively provide for her family.

The following day in the aftermath of the initial outbreak of violence, an estimated 250-300 non-strikers were escorted into the plant by twenty county and state patrolmen armed with

¹⁵⁵ “Morning Disorder Brings 3 Arrests,” p. 2.

¹⁵⁶ Whitt, “Court Limits Vultee Pickets,” p.2.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

submachine and riot guns, directed by the State Commissioner of Safety, Lynn Bomar. Officers initially told picketers and Machinists that their role was to “merely protect life and property and that [they] do not take sides in such matters.”¹⁶⁰ However, Bomar and his men did not appear to be impartial. The same day, Bomar arrested a CIO sympathizer who threatened the use of CIO Political Action Committee (PAC) funds to ensure Governor McCord’s loss in the 1948 gubernatorial election. In addition, on November 12, Bomar arrested three Steelworkers including Louis Krainock, for profanity on a public speaking system near the plant. According to later criminal court indictments, the sound system was audible a half-mile from NashCo. and was used to “threaten...abuse...and curse employees and utter profanity” as well as incite violence among strikers.¹⁶¹ However, there was a discrepancy between the indictment and what local newspapers reported. The *Banner* claimed that strikers were urged over the sound system to “stick by their guns” and victoriously proclaimed, “You have the fight won. The strike is a success.”¹⁶²

The preceding arrests prompted veterans who were striking to accuse Bomar and his men of “high-handed and undemocratic behavior” and appealed to Tennessee Governor Jim McCord to remove the state patrol from the strike. Striking veterans contended that the state patrol’s presence aggravated the situation by intimidating picketers with submachine guns, which coincided with their misuse of law enforcement power. The veterans, whom the Steelworkers claimed made up 70 percent of their support at the plant and approximately 95 percent of the picketers, argued that the state patrol was using tax money to act as a strikebreaker against veterans who were “striking for their rights, [and who] expect[ed] to be given the fair and

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ “CIO Lawyers Map Court Test of Taft Act in Vultee Strike,” *Tennessean*, 12 November 1947, p. 1.

¹⁶¹ *State of Tennessee v. Charles Cox, et al.*, 40 Division 2 Criminal Court, 223-224 (27 January 1948).

¹⁶² “Vultee Asks NLRB Force Strike Halt.” p. 1.

democratic rights that [their] nation stands for.”¹⁶³ Had veterans not experienced a world outside of the southern “culture of dependence” and rigid class structure, the state patrol’s violation of civil rights may not have been contested. Following their appeal, Bomar was ordered by Governor McCord to reduce the number of patrolmen from 36 to 6 if the Steelworkers promised to picket peacefully. In response to the CIO veterans’ plea to Governor McCord, 84 office personnel veterans, who were allowed access to the plant by picketers, praised Governor McCord and Bomar. In the letter they thanked them for “subduing the strife that has attempted to keep us from our jobs,” and claimed that as of November 14, 335 veterans were on the job at the plant and ninety of them constituted office personnel. Because the Steelworkers argued that they were striking for their “democratic rights,” it might have aroused support in the community among those who identified with the veterans. The praises of McCord and Bomar by office personnel were an attempt to counteract any sympathy the Steelworkers’ pleas might have generated. In addition, the Machinists created their own veteran’s committee, chaired by members of the tool and die department and machine shop, in hopes that it would diffuse CIO support among veterans at the plant.

Governor McCord’s conciliatory attitude towards picketers is perplexing given the anti-CIO sentiment that ran throughout Tennessee. However, the 1948 gubernatorial election played an important role in Governor McCord’s decision to comply with picketers. According to political scientist V.O. Key in *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, originally published in 1949, Governor McCord was an extension of the Crump machine. Ed Crump, a Memphis businessman and politician, dominated Memphis and state politics since 1932 and controlled appointments to many political offices in Tennessee. Key argued that the 1948 gubernatorial election was of considerable interest because the Crump machine was challenged by liberal New

¹⁶³ “NLRB to Probe CIO Walkout.” p. 1.

Dealer, Estes Kefauver, and the more conservative southern Democrat, Gordon Browning. Subsequently, Governor McCord could not depend on the democratic votes of western Tennessee and thus, middle Tennessee voters became strategically more important in his electoral success. Middle Tennessee was a “democratic stronghold” and anti-Crump. Key explained that Governor McCord’s political challenger, Gordon Browning was anti-Crump and a World War II veteran whose greatest strength came from Middle Tennessee.¹⁶⁴ If Browning captured the support of World War II veterans in Middle Tennessee, given his personal background and his appeal of being anti-Crump, McCord might have been unwilling to take action against veterans who were striking for their “democratic rights.” Had McCord taken a more aggressive policy towards the picketers, he would have alienated veterans in support of his gubernatorial race.

The Steelworkers also denounced NashCo, accusing them of sending letters and making threatening phone calls to employees who had not come to work, declaring that workers would be laid off if they refused to show up. NashCo denied these accusations. George Hastings acknowledged that some supervisors had called “the more timid workers who [had not] reported [to work] to remind them that the gates were open.”¹⁶⁵ Despite Hasting’s denial, his argument seemed unpersuasive because the company had publicly announced to the *Banner* that an earlier agreement with the Machinists precluded any employee from being inexcusably absent for three days. Moreover, Machinist leader, Harry Summers flatly told reporter Danny Bingham that “we’re not asking [them] to take any personal risks, but any employee who can and refuses to get in the plant will be looking for another job.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, new ed. (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1984), 71.

¹⁶⁵ “CIO Lawyers Map Court Test of Taft Act in Vultee Strike.” p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ “Morning Disorder Brings 3 Arrests,” p. 1.

Several days into the strike, company guards needed to hacksaw NashCo's gates open because the locks had been jammed the night before. On November 18, two picketers were accused of trespassing after they attempted to grease the railroad tracks leading into the plant. The strikers involved denied these accusations, claiming they were there because they had heard about it and wanted to see for themselves. Two days later, picketers were accused of smashing the windshield of a Machinist's car after following him and four other non-strikers home from work. Picketers were also accused of scattering more than 30 pounds of nails on the road leading to the plant to prevent people from entering.¹⁶⁷ Steelworker leaders denied this charge, and Charles Cox hotly told the *Tennessean* that "this nail business is a conspiracy to lay blame on the CIO for acts of vandalism."¹⁶⁸ Whether these accusations were true, frustration among picketers was accelerating by the end of November, and the company's continual unwillingness to bargain, which coincided with various state injunctions, aggravated the situation.

December 1947-Intensifying Violence

Throughout the month of December, strike violence intensified at NashCo as picketers, frustrated with management and the Machinists, resorted to more extreme acts of violence. By December 3, seven Machinists' cars were mysteriously torched in the middle of the night. The Steelworkers also began to assault non-strikers who crossed the picket line. On December 10, Selden Stephens and a fellow picketer were arrested by county patrolmen for the assault and battery of an accountant at NashCo who had gone to a restaurant across the street from the plant for lunch. Charles Barranco, a national representative of the CIO from Maryland, was also arrested for aiding and abetting after he tried to intervene in the dispute. Barranco denied any

¹⁶⁷ *State of Tennessee v. Charles Cox, et al.*, 40 Division 2 Criminal Court. 223 (27 January 1948).

wrongdoing and vehemently told the *Banner* that “all [he] did was tell the officer to get that boy out of the fight.”¹⁶⁹ Stephens’ attack on the accountant reveals that picketers increasingly began to attack anyone associated with the plant, including office employees. Two days later, a warrant was out for the arrest of Wesley Adcox, a machinist at the plant and previous striker, who assaulted E.E. Cooper, a Steelworker out on the picket line, with a blackjack. On December 9, Adcox was stoned and heckled by 40-50 strikers upon his return from lunch, specifically by Cooper and fellow striker, Sy Upchurch, who was formerly a Machinist committeeman and had participated in the negotiations of the 1942 contract. In response, Adcox replied with a series of insults. According to Cooper, on December 12, Adcox called him over after work and assaulted him, reflecting not only the antagonism between picketers and those who returned to the plant, but also non-pickers’ tendency to resort to violence. However, this did not occur often because the state patrol largely served as an instrument of intimidation. Picketers also began to broaden their targets, attacking new job applicants at the plant, which further pointed to their frustration. On December 13, a striker was arrested for the assault and battery of a former NashCo employee who had gone to seek reemployment at the plant after receiving a telegram from NashCo officials offering him a job. Upon leaving the plant, the victim was followed by several picketers, forced off the road, and subsequently beaten by one of his pursuers. Later in January, a female applicant was followed from the plant and beaten by a female picketer after being told, “don’t you know better than to cross our picket line?”¹⁷⁰

On December 11, three strikers, including Charles Cox, were arrested for violating the Tennessee Public Act of 1939, which precluded the use of signs within certain limits of public

¹⁶⁸ “150,000 Strike Damage Charged. Vultee Sues CIO Union One Eve of Hearing to Remand Litigation,” *Tennessean*, 21 November 1947, p. 1.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Danny Bingham, “Striker Faces Trial After Worker Hit,” *Banner*, 12 January 1948: p. 6.

highways. The sign read, "If you cross our picket lines- you double cross yourself! We are striking for a living wage."¹⁷¹ Sy Upchurch had obtained permission from the Davidson County Building Commissioner and the County Highway Commissioner to put the sign up. However, Bomar declared that he was unable to find such a permit and cut the sign down, arresting Cox and the others. Eventually, the Building Commissioner allowed the Steelworkers to hang the sign fifteen feet away from the highway on private property. Whether the Steelworkers had legally obtained the permit, Bomar's actions pointed to his pro-NashCo stance and his tendency to use excessive force, which resulted in the Steelworkers' petition for an injunction against Bomar and his men in federal court.

Several days later, 600 members of the Tennessee National Guard were alerted after a delivery truck was shot at going into the plant and NashCo's telephone lines were severed. While the order was later cancelled after Governor McCord conferred with the State Attorney General, Bomar, and the U.S. District Attorney to examine the role the state had in the strike, the incident reveals that the violence was undermining social stability, and therefore needed to be controlled by the Tennessee National Guard. At the same time, approximately 150 Steelworkers attempted to block the roads leading into NashCo. Bomar told *Banner* reporters that many of them were not locals but were from such cities as Washington DC, Detroit, and Knoxville, referring to them as "Chicago hoodlums."¹⁷² Clowes denied Bomar's accusations, contending that those individuals from out of town were staff representatives of the Steelworkers and the CIO. Rather, the majority of picketers were workers who had come out of the plant to join the

¹⁷¹ Danny Bingham, "CIO Sign Cut Down, Three Arrested; Union Files Suit Against Bomar," *Banner*, 11 December 1947, p. 1.

¹⁷² "Troops Alerted Amid Strike Violence: Truck Shot At. Vultee Phone Lines Are Severed." *Banner*, 15 December 1947, p. 10.

picket line.¹⁷³ Whether Clowes' contention was true, Bomar's personification of strikers as "Chicago hoodlums" reinforced the perception that the Steelworkers were "outsiders."

Violence and vandalism culminated on December 29 when three Steelworkers were charged with attempting to dynamite NashCo's power plant. Danny Bingham referred to the attempted plot as a "well-planned, yet poorly executed, three-pronged, all out attempt to sabotage the plant."¹⁷⁴ Nashville District Attorney J. Carlton Loser contended that had the saboteurs succeeded, several individuals would have been killed and it would have shut the power off for nearby residential areas. One of the accused strikers, Lelon Aaron Davenport who was found on the plant's property with twenty-four sticks of dynamite and fifty feet of fuse wire, confessed to Loser that at the CIO meeting the previous night, strikers had been told to "shut down the plant tomorrow."¹⁷⁵ Davenport told Loser that he did not know the alleged leader of the plot, describing him as a man "from up North." Several days before the attempted sabotage, Davenport and co-conspirator, James Temple, who surrendered several days later, reported that they were beaten by state patrolmen after being arrested for reckless driving. Both men claimed that they were assaulted by the state patrol because Temple had testified at Bomar's federal court trial.

Davenport's recount of the events aroused Loser's suspicion that Steelworker leaders conspired to dynamite the plant. Contributing to this notion was a letter written by Charles Cox telling members: "Monday is the day to shut down the NashCo plant completely! It's got to be done. We've got the company reeling. They're on the ropes and trying to cover up. The thing to do now is: strike the knockout blow—land the winning punch on Monday morning...if you've

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Danny Bingham, "Hunt Pushed For Plotters in Vultee Sabotage Try," *Banner*, 1 January 1948. p. 1.

¹⁷⁵ Danny Bingham, "NLRB Scans Vultee Vote Plea; Blast Try Probed," *Banner*, 30 December 1947. p. 2.

been on strike all along, then be out on the picket line Monday morning!"¹⁷⁶ While this some aroused suspicion, closer examination of the letter revealed that Steelworker leaders told members to be out on the picket line and called upon non-strikers to "share the victory by staying out of that plant and joining us on the picket line."¹⁷⁷ Steelworker leaders were not involved in a conspiracy plot to dynamite the plant. Rather, the dynamite attempt reflects Davenport and Temple's frustration with the company and the state patrol's use of excessive force. Ray Warwick, a CIO spokesperson for Cox called the accusation "fantastic and ridiculous...in a conspiracy a fellow doesn't broadcast his plans through some 1500 mimeographed copies of a letter."¹⁷⁸ Hastings, when asked by the *Tennessean* to comment on the attempted plot simply replied "[it] speaks for itself."¹⁷⁹ Upon Davenport's arrest, CIO attorneys believed that Loser was anti-CIO because they were denied access to their client. Reuben Brazell angrily declared that he was refused the opportunity to speak with his client or be present while the District Attorney was questioning him. Consequently, he asked Vice Mayor of Nashville, Ben West, to serve as co-council for Davenport. West's role in the dispute was interesting given that he was pro-business and readily accepted by the local business elite, including James Stahlman, publisher of the *Banner*. However, Spinney argues that West had a "populist streak" and often appealed to blacks and labor in Nashville.¹⁸⁰ In response to Loser's behavior, West told the *Tennessean*, "You can't hold a man like that in this country. The violation of civil rights of the defendant and Mr. Brazell was high-handed and I [do] not intend to stand for it."¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ *State of Tennessee v. Charles Cox, et al.*, 40 Division 2 Criminal Court, 224 (27 January 1948).

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Herman Teeter, "Loser Eyes Union Link to NashCo Blast Plot: Suspect Seized at Scene, Held in \$3,000 Bond," *Tennessean*, 30 December 1947, p. 1.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁸⁰ Spinney, "Social Change and Public Sector Expansion," 300.

¹⁸¹ Teeter, "Loser Eyes Union Link to NashCo Blast Plot," p. 2.

Other members of the community saw the Steelworker's actions as appalling, suggesting that the dynamite attempt destroyed any legitimacy the CIO had in the community. In order to avoid itself being associated with the CIO, the Nashville Trade and Labor Council, an affiliate of the AFL, which included the Machinists, issued a statement condemning the tactics of the Steelworkers calling them "deplorable and detrimental to satisfactory public labor management relations."¹⁸² Nashville newspapers also found the Steelworker's actions appalling. On December 30, the *Tennessean* published an editorial condemning the Steelworkers and their actions, revealing the erosion of the union's legitimacy in Nashville. The *Tennessean* was a New Deal liberal paper; however, it did not favor labor unions because they undermined business boosters' doctrine of economic growth. Moreover, because of the friendly relationship between Silliman Evans and Victor Emmanuel, who was still president of Avco, the newspaper saw the dynamite attempt as deplorable. The *Tennessean* called the letter sent to union members "dangerous and inflammatory," noting that "the CIO strike management has done everything it could to discredit itself and lead its members into a dangerous and expensive error."¹⁸³ In addition, the *Tennessean* offered an ultimatum to the union, declaring: "Violence, dynamiting, and car-burning by the CIO will certainly not go in Nashville and Middle Tennessee or anywhere else. Tuesday is the day this sort of thing must stop. Every responsible and respectable member of the CIO in Nashville should at once repudiate these tactics. They have no place in decent unionism. They will not be tolerated in Nashville."¹⁸⁴

January-March 1948: Receding Tide of Violence

By January, production at the plant returned to normal levels despite the dispute. With the strike two months old, the surge of violence and vandalism that occurred in December began

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ "Tuesday is the Day," *Tennessean*, 30 December 1947, p. 1.

to recede. Loser's contention that the Steelworkers were involved in a conspiracy plot, and the union's increasingly troubled legal battles with NashCo caused them to lose credibility among workers. This was reflected in the dwindling numbers of picketers which, according to George Hastings, was 384 by January 28.¹⁸⁵

In early January, state patrolmen found the source of the mysterious blasts that occurred when Davenport was arrested. The blasts were an attempt to "knock out" three poles that carried auxiliary power to NashCo, which would have halted production at the plant had the dynamite attempt succeeded. Upon further investigation, on January 27, ten picketers were indicted for conspiracy to dynamite the plant's power station. Judge Charles Gilbert of the Davidson County Criminal Court presided over the case, telling the *Banner* that "people have the right to transact their business and live their lives free from terrorism and vandalism" and if the conspiracy plot were true, "[He] knew of no more horrible situation ever having existed in this community."¹⁸⁶ Among the picketers accused were Louis Krainock, Charles Cox, Charles Barranco, Selden Stephens, and E.E. Cooper. Krainock, Barranco, and Cox were specifically charged with aiding and abetting the attempted dynamite plot by issuing the letter to members. The strikers were accused of 35 overt acts in which they had "unlawfully, feloniously, wickedly, corruptly, fraudulently, and maliciously...conspir[ed] to illegally make [the] strike a success, and to engage in acts...to cause loss of life...of individuals who continued to work at the plant."¹⁸⁷ The indictment charged the ten individuals with seven counts, including conspiracy to dynamite the plant, covered under the Public Acts of 1897, or the "white caps" statute, assault and battery, and arson. The charges brought against the Steelworkers appeared weak, specifically the conspiracy

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ "Ten Strikers Arrested on Plotting, Dynamite Counts," *Tennessean*, 28 January 1948, p. 1.

¹⁸⁶ "Second Striker Held in Sabotage Try: J. S. Temple Accused in Blast Plot at Vultee," *Banner*, 6 January 1948, p. 2.

plot. However, these various counts reflected the growing intolerance of the community towards the Steelworkers. In reaction to the indictment, several Machinists found their car tires slashed, including the Machinists' treasurer, who also had his car window shot out with a .45 caliber pistol.¹⁸⁸

In early February, Steelworker defense attorneys, Reuben Brazell and Ben West filed a motion in Judge Gilbert's criminal court to quash the indictments. They contended that the evidence that had been presented to the grand jury was unwarranted and no witness could verifiably connect the defendants to the overt acts. Therefore, the District Attorney had "no legal or competent evidence connecting the defendants with any crime cognizable under the laws of the state of Tennessee."¹⁸⁹ In response, Loser filed a motion to strike the Steelworker defense council's pleas of abatement, declaring that grand jury proceedings were to remain secret and according to Tennessee law, the grand jury had unrestricted power with respect to issuing indictments. Loser publicly ridiculed the defense, a common tactic in such cases, telling *Banner* reporters that the pleas of abatement were "purely a fishing expedition in an effort to learn the facts before the trial on its merit."¹⁹⁰ The court eventually dismissed Brazell's appeal. However, Judge Gilbert quashed the first count of the indictment, which concerned the conspiracy plot, because it was not covered under the "white caps" statute, which required an organization to be formed upon the sole purpose of murder or assault. This count was the "teeth" of Loser's argument, because it accused the strikers of a felony for which they could serve up to twenty-one years in jail. In addition, Judge Gilbert cast doubt on the feasibility of the other counts because conviction on them would result in a conviction of the first count. As Judge Gilbert explained,

¹⁸⁷ *State of Tennessee v. Charles Cox, et al.*, 40 Division 2 Criminal Court, 222 (27 January 1948).

¹⁸⁸ Danny Bingham, "Vandalism in Strike Flares After 13 Indicted," *Banner*, 28 January 1948, p. 1

¹⁸⁹ *State of Tennessee v. Charles Cox, et al.*, 40 Division 2 Criminal Court, 381 (8 March 1948).

¹⁹⁰ "State to Seek Quashing of Striker's Pleas." *Banner*, 5 February 1948, p. 1.

there was considerable “doubt in the right of the state to proceed to try [the] defendants on the remaining counts...in its present form under the rule of *res adjudicata*.”¹⁹¹ Similar to Wade, Judge Gilbert’s ruling was intriguing. In the early 40s, Gilbert had been secretary of the Southern States Industrial Council, a business organization that was vehemently anti-union. One would have assumed that Gilbert would have ruled in favor of Loser. Instead, his ruling against the conspiracy points to the fact that the criminal charges were weak and unsustainable.

Despite the Steelworkers’ mounting problems, its leaders attempted to raise morale among the strikers. On January 11, Van Bittner attended a Steelworkers’ meeting praising the strikers as “the great revolutionary army in the fight for better living conditions in Nashville” and declared that “this bitter pill of unionism—when we finally get it down the throats of these industrialists—will cure the sickness of cheap wages.”¹⁹² Bittner also told strikers that they were “carrying on the spirit of Andrew Jackson, Sam Houston, and the other great men who made Tennessee and America great, who if here today, [would] be right out on that picket line with you. There is a higher power than that which guides the destinies of men. I’m sure God is with you in this strike because you are right. This is a holy fight.”¹⁹³

Incidents of violence continued through February. Picketers continually harassed Machinists at home. Several Machinists complained that their property had been vandalized, including the windows of their homes, which had been smashed. Other non-strikers reported intimidating telephone calls. One individual quoted an anonymous caller who warned her that “it [would] be no use in your coming to work...because the plant is going to be closed down and if you do come out there you will get beat up.”¹⁹⁴ On February 6, the Nashville, Chattanooga

¹⁹¹ *State of Tennessee v. Charles Cox, et al.*, 40 Division 2 Criminal Court, 381 (8 March 1948).

¹⁹² “Continue Strike, Bittner Urges,” *Tennessean*, 12 January 1948, p. 8.

¹⁹³ Danny Bingham, “Striker Faces Trail After Worker Hit,” *Banner*, 12 January 1948, p. 6.

¹⁹⁴ “Telephoned Threats Hint Further NashCo Violence,” *Tennessean*, 11 February 1948, p. 8.

and St. Louis Railway line that serviced NashCo was dynamited, and the assailants escaped before anyone could identify them. Several charges had been placed near the line, destroying a sixty-yard section of the track, causing the steel rails to buckle and the cross ties to shatter.¹⁹⁵ However, this did not deter NashCo's production. Several days later, the FBI began to investigate this act of sabotage on behalf of the railroad because it violated the Train Wreck statute, which stipulated that it was a federal offense to damage any railroad line used for interstate commerce.¹⁹⁶

When the strike ended on February 23, company officials and the District Attorney responded by declaring that the strike's termination would have no ramifications on the litigation pending in the courts. Company officials reported to the *Tennessean* that NashCo was "looking forward in anticipation of a future of industrial peace and uninterrupted production."¹⁹⁷ Philip Clowes explained to the *Tennessean* that the reason for the ending of the strike was "to save any further sacrifice the people [would] have to make."¹⁹⁸ Despite the union's failure, Clowes praised the work of the picketers declaring that the strike was a "marvelous demonstration for them to put on for so long here in non-union territory."¹⁹⁹

Conclusion

On a basic level, the violence and vandalism that occurred during the strike embodies the discontent and frustration of strikers with the company as well as resentment towards the

¹⁹⁵ Danny Bingham, "Vultee Spur Track Dynamited, Nails Strewn, Auto Burned," *Banner*, 6 February 1948, p. 1.

¹⁹⁶ Danny Bingham, "FBI Probe of Vultee Spur Track Blasting Set," *Banner*, 11 February 1948, p. 1.

¹⁹⁷ Roque Fajardo, "CIO Calls Off NashCo Strike, Workers Vote 5:1 To End 104-Day Walkout At Once: Company Spokesman Says Not All Employees Involved Will Be Taken Lack, Calls Production Normal," *Tennessean*, 23 February 1948, p. 1.

¹⁹⁸ "NashCo Strikers to 'Return' Today: Company Indicates Present Needs Won't Put Them On Job," *Tennessean*, 24 February 1948, p. 2.

¹⁹⁹ "CIO Calls Off NashCo Strike," p. 1.

relationship between the Machinists and NashCo. CIO organizers attempted to maintain order among the picketers. While their commitment might have been genuine, the chances of it being maintained at NashCo were impossible. Worker resentment was so rampant that violence at the plant was inevitable and served as an outlet for this frustration and resentment.

Looking solely at the picketers, particularly Davenport and Temple, their actions reveal their disenchantment with the corporatist nature of Nashville and the South. For picketers, the company embodied workers' false notion of dependency on the business elite to provide for economic security. Moreover, the rigid class structure of the South ran countercurrent to what striking veterans fought for in World War II, which had exposed them to the realities of inequality, democratic norms, and class identity outside of the South. Therefore, anything associated with NashCo was deemed by picketers as part of the establishment and was subsequently attacked. This was noticeable with the broadening targets of the Steelworker's assaults to include office employees and new applicants, which often took place at the victim's home. In this respect, picketers' attacks on the "southern establishment" reveals that the question of CIO representation superceded the issue of wages and union representation. As Bittner noted, the strike was a "holy fight," surrounding the issues of workers' rights and class identity. Cox's emphasis on democratic rights, the veterans' appeal to Governor McCord, and Van Bittner's visit to Steelworker members all point to the fact that while wages were important, the victory Steelworkers hoped for would have been a triumph for worker solidarity, thus breaking the stronghold of NashCo and the business elite over labor.

The active prosecution by Loser and the state patrol reveals the means in which the community attempted to control the Steelworkers when they provided a sharp challenge to the corporatist class structure of Nashville and undermined social stability. This was seen with the

attempted dynamite plot. Loser's assumption that Steelworker officials conspired to dynamite the plant was false. There was no conspiracy that Krainock, Cox, or Barranco were involved in based on the letter sent to its members when read in its entirety. Had CIO officials been involved, it would have branded them as radical and violent, leading to greater difficulties in organizing other plants because the union would have lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the community, which, ironically, did happen. With the exception of Davenport's confession, one could argue that Loser's tactics appeared to be nothing more than a prosecutorial witch-hunt based on biased witnesses and half-truths. Many of these indictments were dropped or dismissed, revealing that there was little evidence to support these claims, and proving that the driving force behind the active prosecution of these crimes was the need for control.

Despite the Steelworkers' aspirations, the strike failed, and the violence instigated by them, including the attempted dynamite plot, damaged the credibility they had in Nashville. Barbara Griffith argues that workers' fear over the community's reaction to unionization was a constant barrier the CIO faced in organizing the South in the late 1940s. Consequently, the CIO had to consistently ensure some sense of security for its members. However, Griffith explains that police brutality and public disenchantment with the union undermined this sense of security, and in the eyes of the workers, weakened the CIO's power vis-à-vis the business community.²⁰⁰ In the case of Nashville, the state patrol's excessive use of force, coupled with ardent criminal prosecution of the Steelworkers, undermined the union's attempts to create a sense of security. In addition, unions were too integrated into the business community and threatened by the CIO's arrival in Nashville to provide assistance to the CIO's objectives. Instead, as seen with the Nashville Trade and Labor Council, conservative unions reacted negatively to the Steelworkers' cause, particularly when violence became an issue. To a certain degree, the strikers' violence

was self-destructive because it reinforced the stereotype that the CIO was violent and radical. Consequently, membership dropped considerably by January, and a social stigma associated with the Steelworkers developed, in which the union was viewed as a terrorist organization, not only reflected in the *Tennessean*'s editorial on January 1, but in Knox's editorial cartoon as well.

²⁰⁰ Griffith, 101.

Conclusion

The events at NashCo reflect the pervasive anti-union sentiment that existed in the South in the late 1940s and the difficulty the CIO faced in a corporatist society at an increasingly conservative time. Cash's notion of individualism and the relative infancy of heavy industry in Nashville contributed to this lack of class identity. However, southern individualism was underscored by southern business boosterism because it ensured a divided workforce, thereby generating greater profits for the company. More importantly, the realities of the Depression and the high rates of unemployment created a sense of dependency among workers for management to provide economic security, which was compounded by the Nashville business elite's control over anti-Depression programs during the New Deal era. This ensured company domination and preserved the class structure of the South, causing unions to remain relatively weak in Nashville. The Machinists' position in NashCo before 1947 reflects this mode of dependency. Despite the company's tactics of intimidation, Local 735 refused to contest management for fear that it would undermine their economic security as well as their traditional notion of elite craft unionism, which did not rely on worker solidarity and class awareness. Consequently, NashCo wages were considerably less than their northern counterparts. Beneath the surface, workers harbored increasing resentment towards the company and Machinist leadership, particularly unskilled employees who were included in the bargaining unit, but were not equally represented. This growing resentment allowed the Steelworkers to enter the plant and capitalize on workers' grievances.

With the implementation of Operation Dixie, and the beginnings of CIO organization at NashCo in January 1947, NashCo management feared that the union could usurp their control by destroying workers' sense of dependency on management. Unlike the Machinists, the

Steelworkers did not acknowledge the “culture of dependence” between workers and management. Rather, their militancy in addressing workers’ grievances at the plant and their commitment to worker solidarity, allowed workers to see that they did not have to depend on management for economic security. In turn, workers began to identify with each other, thereby raising class-consciousness. Nevertheless, the problem was that class identity ran countercurrent to the corporatist class structure of the South. As Cash explained, “the union [was]...coming to grips with the ancient hierarchic feeling and system of the South.”²⁰¹

However, CIO organizers failed to see the troubles associated with an organizing drive that was dedicated to such ideals as worker solidarity. While the CIO’s non-compliance with Taft-Hartley crippled its efforts, the fact that it did not take into account the “culture of dependence” in the South also contributed to the Steelworkers’ failure. While organizers conceded to the “social myth” that paternalism was at the root of their troubles, it could not fully explain the events at NashCo. Organizers failed to take into account southern individualism and worker dependency on management to provide for economic security. Moreover, Nashville was dominated and controlled by business boosters who linked the potential economic growth of the community with political and social stability, which was undermined by the NashCo strike. In this respect, the CIO’s regulatory New Deal ideology and their desire for higher wages, conflicted with the commercial elite’s business boosterism, and their desire to control the mechanisms of labor, which they had been able to do with AFL-affiliated unions.

NashCo management, rather than dirty its hands in the dispute, relied on the antagonistic relationship between the Machinists and the Steelworkers to provide verbal assaults on the picketers, creating an image that the CIO was nothing more than an organization that engaged in practices of union-raiding. Using the courts and its strength as a member of the Nashville

²⁰¹ Cash, 352.

business community, the company successfully de-legitimized the Steelworkers' claim of representation. In this respect, the company successfully portrayed itself as a law-abiding firm that remained within the confines of the court and NLRB proceedings, which contributed to the Steelworkers' ultimate failure at the plant. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that the company would have had such success without Taft-Hartley. The conservative nature of the act and its anti-labor amendments allowed the company to capitalize on the growing antagonism of the nation towards unions and the disenchantment with New Deal liberalism, given the growth of the economy since World War II.

In a broader context, the Nashville community also feared the union's aggressiveness because it created tensions within the class structure and was portrayed by Machinist leadership as having a hidden agenda. The police brutality that occurred during the strike under Bomar reflects the use of violence as a means of control. Moreover, the vicious verbal attacks by the *Banner* and the *Tennessean* exemplify the southern "social myth" that the CIO was radical and violent, and often engaged in acts of terrorism to achieve their goals. Ironically, the violence that took place during the strike on the part of picketers was self-fulfilling. While CIO organizers attempted to contain it, worker resentment was too strong so that as injunctions were enforced, and NLRB proceedings took place, violence served as an outlet for picketers to express their frustration with the company and the incompatibility of their new class awareness with a social structure that was rigid and corporatist.

Clearly, the conflict at NashCo had nothing to do with Cold War ideology and NashCo's fear of communist activities. However, the increasing conservatism of the nation provided an environment for anti-union sentiment to thrive in. More importantly, the strike dealt with the need to control workers on the part of the company in order to maximize profits by creating a

sense of dependency among its employees, which remained so strong that NashCo workers were never able to reconcile class identity with southern corporatism.

Figures

A Striking Resemblance To Terrorism



²⁰² John Knox, "A Striking Resemblance To Terrorism," *Banner*, 4 December 1947, 1.

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