

The Impact of the Postwar Compromise on Canadian Unionism: The Formation of an Auto Worker Local in the 1950s

Don Wells

The only way Ford is going to get union protection in his plants ... is to have the UAW transformed into a strongly centralized organization exerting iron discipline over its constituent locals and over its rank and file.

Business Week 79, June 1941.

Canadian Fordism and the New Unionism

AFTER WORLD WAR II, Canada's political economy was stabilized by a far-reaching compromise between labour and capital. This essay centres on the role this compromise played in creating the kind of unionism which came to dominate postwar Canadian industrial relations. The compromise changed not only relations between unions and employers but also between workers and their unions. The principal focus for understanding the nature of this new unionism is the founding of a United Auto Workers (UAW) local at a Ford assembly plant in the early 1950s.

The postwar compromise was built around a 'Fordist' framework for mass production based on a Taylorist division of labour. Under Taylorism, semi-skilled workers performed repetitive tasks while managers and technical staff, such as engineers, exercised a near monopoly not only over day-to-day workplace governance but also over strategic decisions concerning technological innovation, new investments, and the organization of work.

In the years following World War II, Taylorism combined with mechanization to generate extraordinary productivity increases. Such productivity might have precipitated the kind of crisis of overproduction that led to the depression of the 1930s. However, Fordism helped counter this tendency toward economic stagnation. In essence, unions assented to Taylorism in return for a share of the resulting productivity increases. Workers' gains came in the form of wage improvements

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and Keynesian 'welfare state' measures such as unemployment insurance, pensions, welfare, and public health-care programs. Fordism helped to provide a mass market to balance mass production, enabling large numbers of workers to acquire 'middle class' lifestyles. The 'welfare state' measures reduced the volatility of business cycles: recessions triggered increases in unemployment insurance, welfare, and other state payments, hence improving consumer demand. This stimulated economic recovery and helped smooth out the 'boom and bust' peaks and troughs of business cycles. Not least in significance, this economic stabilization provided many workers with job security for the first time.

While Fordism became dominant in most OECD states after World War II, there were variations. Canada, together with Australia and the US, adopted a liberal version of Fordism marked by less state regulation. This version contrasted with more conservative variants found in countries such as Austria, France and Germany, and with social-democratic versions of Fordism in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands.¹

Canada's liberal or 'weak' Fordism reflected such factors as the country's relatively low rate of unionization, the lack of a single, highly centralized union federation, the absence of a formal role for labour in workplace decision-making, and lack of a strong social-democratic party.² Canada's weak Fordism also reflected the vulnerability of the country's open economy to international trade, technology, and investment pressures, especially from the US. Much of Canada's economy (especially manufacturing) was either too weak to compete internationally or too oriented to foreign markets to contribute significantly to developing the national economy. Furthermore, Canada's export-oriented economy was highly vulnerable to price volatility in international markets. This reinforced business cycle swings. For these reasons, Canada's economy was less able to support a strong welfare state and a more state-centred industrial relations system.³ A third and related reason for Canada's weak Fordism was the highly regional, uneven nature of an economy where much of the West and the Maritimes served as an economic hinterland to central Canada. Fourth, reflecting this economic regionalism as well as cultural variations, especially francophone Québec, Canada's federalism became one of the most decentralized federal models in the advanced capitalist world. Since the provinces had primary responsibility for labour law,

¹For a comparative analysis using this typology see Gosta Esping-Anderson, *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton 1990). On relations between unions and Fordism in the US, see Nelson Lichtenstein, "From Corporatism to Collective Bargaining," in Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order* (Princeton 1989), 122-52.

²David Cameron, "Social Democracy, Corporatism, Labour Quiescence and the Representation of Economic Interest in Advanced Capitalist Society," in J.H. Goldthorpe, ed., *Order and Conflict in Contemporary Capitalism* (Oxford 1984).

³Jane Jenson, "'Different' but Not 'Exceptional': Canada's Permeable Fordism," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, 26, 1 (1989), 69-94.

industrial relations were segmented along provincial lines. Federal-provincial fiscal and jurisdictional conflicts also inhibited the development of national welfare state programs.⁴ Fifth, because the dominant political parties have been oriented to 'nation-building,' class politics have been marginalized.⁵

It was in this context that Canadian Fordism developed into one of the weakest in the industrialized world. In effect, despite organized labour's wartime gains, Canada's Fordism reflected a balance of class forces that remained heavily lopsided in favour of capital. Under these circumstances, and unlike the more statist versions of Fordism, Canadian Fordism was built around a "Wagner model" of labour relations named after the 1935 National Labour Relations Act in the US, known as the Wagner Act. That Act established conditions for setting collective bargaining in motion, including the right to organize independent unions, the right to strike, and the obligation to bargain in good faith. The Wagner Act did not, however, compel the employer and the union to agree on a contract. Moreover, Canada's Wagner model was even more restrictive of unions than was the US model, particularly because strike rights were so limited.

As will be explained in greater detail, Canada's Wagner model developed out of a combination of prewar labour laws and wartime labour codes legislated by the federal government. The core of Canada's Wagner model was promulgated in 1944 when order-in-council PC 1003 gave workers the right to unionize and bargain collectively in individual workplaces. In exchange, union leaders agreed to act against their members' 'direct action' tactics (slowdowns, sitdowns, walkouts, etc.) while collective agreements were in force.⁶ Many employers thus supported this Wagner model of unionism in order to stabilize labour relations.⁷

A second key feature of Canada's Wagner model was the arbitration award by Supreme Court Justice Rand after the momentous 1945 Ford strike in Windsor Ontario. Rand's award provided the United Auto Workers (UAW) with automatic deduction of union dues, applicable to all workers in the workplace, irrespective of whether they belonged to the union. In this way, the Rand Formula solved the problem of 'free riders' who benefitted from union contracts without paying union

⁴Keith Banting, *The Welfare State and Canadian Federalism* (Kingston 1987); Peter Leslie, *Federal State, National Economy* (Toronto 1987).

⁵Janine Brodie and Jane Jenson, *Crisis, Challenge and Change: Party and Class in Canada Revisited* (Toronto 1988). Peter Bruce also argues compellingly that the strength of Canadian relative to American labour is rooted in the different political systems of the two nations. See his "Political Parties and Labor Legislation in Canada and the U.S.," *Industrial Relations*, 28, 2 (1989), 115-41.

⁶Peter Warrian, "Labour is Not a Commodity: A Study of the Rights of Labour in the Canadian Postwar Economy, 1944-48," PhD thesis, University of Waterloo, 1986, 112; H.A. Logan, *State Intervention and Assistance in Collective Bargaining* (Toronto 1956), 31.

⁷H.D. Woods, "Canadian Collective Bargaining and Dispute Settlement Policy: An Appraisal," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 21, 4 (1955), 447-65.

dues. The Formula was later adopted in most union contracts in mass industry. The union's new financial security, however, was won at a price. In many ways, Rand's decision required union leaders to become more responsible to employers than to their members. It weakened the ties between union leaders and members, especially because union representatives no longer collected dues from each worker. Rand also put teeth in union leaders' obligation to repudiate workers' direct action. Failure to do so could lead to the forfeiture of union dues payments. The resulting institutional separation of union leaders from their members became increasingly embedded in Canada's Wagner model. As labour historian Bryan Palmer has concluded, Rand "set the tone for the postwar period."⁸

Yet Canada's Wagner model was not permanently entrenched until the passage of the federal Industrial Relations and Disputes Investigation Act (IRDIA) in 1948. The IRDIA's predecessor, PC 1003, had been extended for two years after the war, but it had been a temporary measure. It was not until after 1948 that the core of the IRDIA, and hence the Wagner model, was adopted by most provinces. Key prewar provisions, such as the compulsory conciliation of disputes before legal strikes, combined with the subsequent elaboration of legalistic grievance and arbitration procedures to advance the Wagner model. This model legitimated and stabilized unions at the cost of confining them in a web of legalistic obligations which limited their members' ability to engage in militant action.

In this context, a more hierarchical, bureaucratic and legalistic unionism arose to replace the more militant, rank-and-file centred, and class-oriented unionism of the 1930s and 1940s. Senior union leaders generally facilitated this shift. In 1949, for example, the UAW International Executive Board gained the constitutional power to discipline workers *when local leaders refused*.⁹ Collective bargaining gains were increasingly based on productivity improvements that required workers and unions to cooperate with overall managerial control. In 1950, for example, the Canadian UAW signed a three-year contract with Ford in return for major productivity-based wage increases.¹⁰ The Wagner model was thus a compromise in which industrial unionism shifted from a greater emphasis on mobilizing workers through militancy and class solidarity to one which centred on bargaining multi-year contracts that guaranteed labour peace. This required workers to drop any ambi-

⁸*Working Class Experience* (Toronto 1992), 282.

⁹Steven Jeffreys, *Management and Managed* (Cambridge 1986) 31. Indicative of management's increasing control, wildcat strikes declined by half at Ford and GM plants in the US in the years immediately after the war. Stephen Herzenberg, "Towards a Cooperative Commonwealth? Labor and Restructuring in the U.S. and Canadian Auto Industries," PhD thesis, MIT, 1991, 94.

¹⁰UAW, *Twenty Five Years of UAW Progress at Ford, Collective Bargaining Gains, 1941-1966* (Detroit 1966) (MG 28 I119 Acc. 84147, Box 9, National Archives of Canada, hereafter NAC); UAW, *Our Union at Ford, 1941 Contract through 1976-1979 Contract* (Detroit 1977), 17.

tions they had for greater participation in decision-making in their workplaces and in their own unions.

In sum, this framework encouraged a quiescent labour politics. Since the industrial relations system focussed on individual workplaces or firms rather than economic sectors or the national economy, there was less likelihood of class-defined unionism developing. The Wagner model implied that conflicts between workers and their employers mainly concerned how to 'divide the pie' rather than how to make it. Just as Canadian Fordism was built around the Wagner model, so the Wagner model was built around a particular regime of labour relations in the workplace. With Fordism based on a Taylorist division of labour, that regime was defined by a managerial monopoly over the strategic areas of decision-making, such as the organization of work, and the location of investment.

Prior to this set of changes, wartime industrial unionism had contained strong elements of rank-and-file militancy that threatened managerial prerogatives. As will be seen, UAW Local 200 at Ford in Windsor, Ontario, typified this kind of unionism. Indeed, a culture of worker direct action there during the war led to the 1945 Ford strike which resulted in the Rand decision. The strike — together with the wave of strikes by steelworkers, packinghouse workers, rubber workers, miners, loggers and others, which came in its wake — represented the zenith of this militant rank-and-file unionism. From that point on, much of the initiative passed from workplace action by workers and local leaders to a less militant, more hierarchical unionism centred on national and international union leaders and staff. This transition took place not only in the UAW but throughout industrial unionism in Canada.¹¹

This new unionism took shape during the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. While many analysts have focussed almost exclusively on union elites, the import of this transition is most evident at the *local* union level. This can be seen most clearly in the formation of new locals which lacked the traditions of wartime militancy and solidarity. Because the concern here is to analyse the *consequences* of Canadian Fordism on unions, the focus of this paper is on the postwar years. More particularly, this paper centres on the formation of UAW Local 707 at a Ford assembly plant in Oakville, Ontario in the early 1950s, when the transition to the new unionism was more advanced. Local 707 has the advantage, for analytical purposes, of being created in the context of a partial transfer of operations from Ford Windsor. This organic relation between the two locals provides a unique vantage point for assessing the shift from one kind of unionism to another.

Although various union locals have their own particularities, Local 707 was typical in many respects of other UAW locals created during the expansion and restructuring of the auto industry in the late 1940s and the 1950s. Furthermore,

¹¹On the transition to Wagner unionism among Steelworkers, Packinghouse Workers and Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, see David Matheson, "The Canadian Working Class and Industrial Legality, 1939-1949," MA Thesis, Queen's University, 1989, esp. ch. 3.

because the UAW was not only the largest union in Canada in this period but also the union on which much of the new industrial unionism was modeled in these years, the study of Local 707 illuminates the formation of postwar Canadian industrial unionism more generally.

Ford Windsor: From the Old to the New Unionism

THE UAW AT FORD of Canada grew out of a core of militants who had been working at Ford Windsor since the 1930s.¹² While it is important not to ascribe widespread radical consciousness to this militancy, it is nevertheless true that the militants' struggles were part of a broader working-class mobilization in the 1930s and early 1940s. These struggles against their authoritarian anti-union employer were sustained by considerable solidarity generated inside the plants and in working-class neighborhoods. Their organizing efforts paid off in 1941 after the UAW organized Ford in the US and then put pressure on Ford of Canada. For several years after the first union contract with Ford of Canada in 1942, leaders of UAW Local 200 constituted an organic part of worker resistance to speedup, paternalism, favouritism, and other dimensions of managerial power in the workplace. Throughout the war, union leaders, especially at the local level, supported many job actions, big and small.¹³ However, senior UAW leaders became more ambivalent about such direct action as they perceived that by acting as guarantors of industrial peace they could achieve union security in the context of the Wagner model.¹⁴

As noted earlier, the federal government's introduction of PC 1003 in 1944 granted union rights to organize and to bargain collectively, as well as other concessions, but also required union leaders to discourage rank-and-file direct action and to channel workplace conflicts into the grievance and arbitration procedure.¹⁵ Unionists generally regarded this compromise as a great gain for

¹²S.C. Cako, "Labour's Struggle for Union Security: The Ford of Canada Strike, Windsor, 1945," MA Thesis, University of Windsor, 1971; Irving Abella "Oshawa in 1937," in Abella, ed., *On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in Canada 1919-1949* (Toronto 1974).

¹³Concerning direct action at Local 200 during the war, see David Fraser "Years of Struggle: A History of Local 200 of the United Automobile Workers of America at Ford Canada, Windsor, Ontario, 1941 to 1955," MA thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1982; Cako, "Labour's Struggle for Union Security"; Raymond Houlahan, "A History of Collective Bargaining in Local 200 UAW," MA thesis, University of Windsor, 1962; and my "Origins of Canada's Wagner Model of Industrial Relations: The United Auto Workers in Canada and the Suppression of Rank and File Unionism, 1936-1953," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 20, 2 (1995), 193-225.

¹⁴Wells, "Origins."

¹⁵Regarding the constraints that PC 1003 imposed on unions, see Judy Fudge, "Voluntarism, Compulsion and the 'Transformation' of Canadian Labour Law During World War II," in Gregory S. Kealey and Greg Patmore, eds., *Canadian and Australian Labour History*, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History and the Committee on Canadian Labour History (Brisbane 1990).

labour.¹⁶ In this way PC 1003, and the little-known no-strike pledge which the Canadian UAW took a few months later,¹⁷ helped maintain orderly production for the duration of the war.

A strong culture of worker militancy remained, however. The ninety-nine day strike at Ford Windsor in 1945 expressed this militancy against a still recalcitrant, anti-union employer.¹⁸ Strongly supported by workers across Windsor and much of Ontario and Detroit, thousands of picketers shut down the plant in defiance not only of Ford but of provincial police and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. There were numerous sympathy strikes, and a nation-wide general strike almost erupted. Throughout, a majority of Local 200 remained strongly committed to the strike. When Ottawa arranged an arbitration offer, the strikers voted it down, despite pressure from most top UAW leaders. The workers and local union leaders finally voted to end the strike only after further pressure from senior UAW leaders.¹⁹

As previously emphasized, the subsequent Rand decision was a turning point. The ruling required all workers, not just union members, to pay union dues, thereby placing union finances, and thus union organization, on firmer ground. In return, labour leaders were to suppress direct action by the members. The Rand decision explicitly stated that although management would be concerned about the cost of the checkoff and the greater strength this might give the union, managerial power would be fortified:

... the expense can properly be taken as the employer's contribution toward making the union through its greater independence more effective in its disciplinary pressure even upon employees who are not members, an end which the Company admits to be desirable.²⁰

In addition, the Rand Formula implied a reduction in the UAW's reliance on workplace stewards and substewards who had been collecting dues from each member.²¹

¹⁶ Logan, *State Intervention and Assistance in Collective Bargaining*, 30.

¹⁷ Report of UAW Local 200, Minutes of District Council 26, 22-25 November 1944, (Box: Canada Council Minutes, Archives of the CAW, Don Mills, ON, hereafter CAW).

¹⁸ Indicative of Ford of Canada's continuing opposition to the UAW, the company used a loophole in PC 1003 which allowed it to stipulate that management regarded the president of Local 200 as the representative of the workers in the plant but not of the UAW. Logan, *State Intervention in Collective Bargaining*, 31.

¹⁹ Letter from George Burt to Jerry Taylor, 5 January 1949, 6, Walter Reuther Archives, Wayne State University, hereafter WSU, UAW Canada Officers, Box 51, Folder 4.

²⁰ "Award on Issue of Union Security in Ford Dispute," (Rand Report), *Labour Gazette*, 46 (January-June 1946), 128.

²¹ Letter from George Burt to Jerry Taylor, 5 January 1949 (WSU, UAW Officers Canada, Box 51, File 4). On the decline of steward power in American UAW plants in these years, see Nelson Lichtenstein, "Autoworker Militancy and the Structure of Factory Life," *Journal of American History* 67, 2 (1980), 335-53.

While sporadic and largely localized direct action continued at Ford Windsor throughout the 1940s, militancy was increasingly funneled into legal strikes that were essentially economic in nature. Collective bargaining increasingly centred on issues such as wage increases, inflation protection, pension plans, medical plans, etc. By now it was preordained that contracts uniformly guaranteed management control. Occasional challenges to that control, such as opposition to excessive workloads, speedups or poor working conditions, were channeled into grievance and arbitration procedures. Yet these procedures were largely ineffective at dealing with these conflicts over management control because contracts gave workers little, if any, say about such issues. Moreover, the grievance and arbitration procedures tended to transform the potential for collective resistance into individualized complaints that were adjusted by quasi-legal procedures beyond the griever's control.

Furthermore, power was increasingly concentrated at the national and international (US) levels of the UAW leadership. The 1946 and 1947 election victories of Walter Reuther in his bids to become President of the International UAW led to the entrenchment of a dominant centre-right faction. This faction used Cold War tensions to marginalize local militants by castigating them as 'Communists.'²² The Reuther regime, like its counterparts in other industrial unions, was dedicated to maintaining orderly, 'responsible' labour-management relations in which workers would share the fruits of productive efficiency while leaving management with its prerogatives in the key areas such as investment planning, organization of work, and maintenance of discipline.

This marginalization of members and local leaders was reinforced in 1948 when Reuther accepted a General Motors initiative to institutionalize a system of wage increments, including a cost-of-living escalator and an automatic annual wage increase (the annual improvement factor) in multi-year contracts.²³ In return, UAW leaders increasingly defended management rights to control production by suppressing direct action. At Local 200 the role of senior UAW leaders in this compromise was made clear in 1950 and 1951 when a series of major wildcat strikes broke out. According to the former President of Local 200, UAW leaders "had to uphold the law" and "went into the plant and told them to stop."²⁴ UAW leaders who opposed the strike were assaulted by the members, but the UAW leadership and management prevailed.²⁵ This incident exemplified the operation of the Wagner model in collective bargaining and contract enforcement in the workplace.

²²Charlotte Yates, *From Plant to Politics* (Philadelphia 1993), 58-77.

²³Harry Katz, *Shifting Gears: Changing Labor Relations in the U.S. Automobile Industry* (Cambridge 1985), 16-7.

²⁴Interview, Jack Taylor, 28 September 1993.

²⁵Letter from members of UAW Local 200 to E. Mazey, UAW International Secretary-Treasurer, 16 January 1952 (WSU, UAW Canada Locals, Box 88, File 12); Fraser, "Years of Struggle," 129-30, 187.

Finally, the power of the senior Canadian and International UAW leadership was reinforced by the dependency of many small parts plants and depots on the UAW for a variety of union services such as leadership training, and arbitration assistance. Because the UAW gave small locals the right to send at least one delegate to all UAW conventions, and subsidized these delegates' travel and accommodation so they could attend, the small locals carried a disproportionate political weight which was biased in favour of the senior leadership.²⁶

Ford Oakville: The New Unionism

THE PARTIAL TRANSFER of operations from Ford's Windsor complex to a new site in Oakville, Ontario, in the early 1950s was part of a major corporate restructuring. Ford built twenty-two new plants in North America after the war, and Oakville was part of the expansion.²⁷ Although Ford promised new investments for Windsor as well,²⁸ the immediate impact of the move was a loss of about 3800 jobs (40 per cent of the membership) at the Windsor local. While the company's official explanation for the move was that it would place production closer to its main market along the shore of Lake Ontario, there was also a labour relations rationale. As a Ford Vice President pointed out, the company expected a "better climate" at Oakville.²⁹ Whatever other advantages the move had from Ford's perspective, it demonstrated that management had the upper hand over the Windsor local with its continuing traditions of rank and file militancy.³⁰

However, Oakville's significance extends beyond the expansion of production to new locales or the example of management's capacity to punish worker militancy. The creation of a new UAW local at Oakville exemplified a transition in the nature of industrial unionism. The 'new' unionism represented a major move away from the kind of local union power and militancy that had developed in the Canadian UAW during the war. In contrast to the many workers in auto and other industrial sectors who organized *themselves* into unions and whose workplace

²⁶I thank Rod McNeil for explaining the political significance of this delegate and subsidy structure to me.

²⁷*Ford Facts*, 2 November 1954.

²⁸Ford of Canada promised \$30 million in new investments at Windsor and assured the UAW that "over the long run there will be more jobs in Ford of Canada's Windsor operations than there have ever been." Letter from R.M. Sale, President of the Ford Motor Company of Canada to George Burt, Canadian Regional Director of the UAW, 15 November 1952, in "Exhibits Accompanying Submission of the Company to Conciliation Proceedings Between UAW-CIO Local 707 and Ford Motor Company, Ontario Assembly Plant," Archives of CAW Local 707, Oakville, ON. Hereafter L707.

²⁹UAW Canada Companies, Box 131, Folder 1, WSU.

³⁰Confirming this tradition, there were 17 work stoppages at Ford Windsor within a month of the move being announced. C.W. Gonick, "Aspects of Unemployment in Canada," PhD thesis, University of California at Berkeley, 1965, 127-8.

militancy lay at the heart of union power during the late 1930s and early 1940s, the formation of the Oakville UAW local illustrates the ascendance of a new kind of industrial unionism which has prevailed ever since.

Although only thirteen years separate Ford's recognition in 1941 of Windsor Local 200 and its recognition of the UAW at Oakville in 1954, times had changed dramatically. Unlike Local 707, Local 200 grew out of the 1930's Depression. Windsor workers had experienced not only fundamental economic insecurity but also the political mobilization of the 1930s and the early 1940s and the wartime struggles inside the plants. At Ford Windsor there was a great deal of direct action, including mass walkouts in 1942, 1943 and 1945, as well as sabotage and numerous other stoppages on a lesser scale.³¹ The war years were also a period of political ferment in which Communists, Trotskyists, social democrats, sections of the Catholic Church, and others fought to influence the direction of the labour movement and in the process contributed to the workers' politicization.³²

By contrast, most of those who hired on at Ford Oakville in 1953 and 1954 were in their twenties and had been influenced more by postwar prosperity than the struggles of the earlier years. By this time, the wartime contest over who would control critical aspects of production had been largely won by Ford. Workers were restricted to limited and defensive 'job control' rights based on detailed job descriptions and seniority rules. The major gains made by unions such as the UAW were not found in production but in a (sometimes aggressively adversarial) distributive politics centred on wage and benefit increases. This kind of unionism meshed with lives that revolved not around the public duties and collective efforts of a country at war but around the individual and private goals of marriage and child-rearing, and the mesmerizing cornucopia of Canada's Fordist economy. Houses, cars, refrigerators, washers and dryers, televisions and all the other major consumer items brought these workers into what was defined as a "middle class" standard of living.³³

They had also been living through a mounting political campaign that nominally targeted Communists but which cast a pall over working-class politics generally. Nurtured by American McCarthyism and its Canadian variant, this Cold

³¹Fraser, "Years of Struggle," 27; F.D. Millar, "Shapes of Power: The Ontario Labour Relations Board, 1944 to 1950," PhD thesis, York University, 1981, 251.

³²Irving Abella, *Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour* (Toronto 1973); Fr. Brian Hogan, "Catechizing Culture: Assumption College, the Pius XI Labour School, and the United Automobile Workers, Windsor, 1940-1950," *Canadian Catholic History Studies*, 55 (1988); Gad Horowitz, *Canadian Labour in Politics* (Toronto 1968); J.S. Napier, *Memories of Building the UAW* (Toronto 1976); Wayne Roberts and John Bullen, "A Heritage of Hope and Struggle: Workers, Unions and Politics in Canada, 1930-1982," in Michael Cross and Gregory Kealey, eds., *Modern Canada 1930-1980s* (Toronto 1984); and Yates, *From Plant to Politics*.

³³*The Canadian Labour Movement* (Toronto 1989), 94.

War campaign was exploited by dominant leadership factions inside the labour movement.³⁴ The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 accelerated these developments. This Cold War political culture also meshed with the experiences of many new Ford workers who had recently immigrated to Canada from Eastern Europe. By the 1950's, over 100,000 'displaced persons' entered the Canadian workforce. Since many of them had witnessed Soviet occupation of their countries, they often had a deep antipathy to the left as a whole.³⁵ These factors contributed to the victory of centre-right forces within the leadership of most industrial unions, including the UAW. In this context, many workers saw the left as illegitimate and even dangerous. All of this was a major contrast to the image that many Communists and their supporters had as 'superpatriots' in their support of Canada's war effort after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in 1941.³⁶

Most important in explaining the change in UAW locals, Ford of Canada, once among the most die-hard in opposing unionization, now tolerated the UAW. Under Walter Reuther's 'one party' leadership, the UAW had reached a rapprochement with Ford and the other major automakers. The impact of that rapprochement and of the Wagner model and the Fordist compromise out of which it grew, is clearly illustrated by the early history of the UAW Ford local in Oakville.

The Founding of UAW Local 707

IN THE LATE SPRING of 1953, UAW international representative Jack Taylor, former president of UAW Local 200, arrived in Oakville while the plant was still under construction and before any workers had been hired. Later on a small number of workers assisted him in the organizing drive. He already knew many of them because they had been hired after being laid off at Windsor. This was a far cry from

³⁴Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour*, *passim*, esp. 142-67; Yates, *From Plant to Politics*, 64-72; Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 91; Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 290-8; and Reg Whitaker, "Fighting the Cold War on the Home Front," *Socialist Register 1984* (London 1984), 59-61.

³⁵There is evidence that Canadian immigration policies favoured right wing immigrants. See "Inco fought unions with former Nazis, RCMP file reveals," *Toronto Star*, 15 November 1993, A 8.

³⁶For example, the Communist-led United Electrical Workers took a no-strike pledge in 1941. Abella, *Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour*, 141. However, the UAW in Canada did not call for "uninterrupted maximum production" until June 1944 (Minutes of District 26 Council Meeting, 22-25 November 1944, CAW). The Canadian UAW did not affirm a no-strike pledge until early 1945 (Minutes of District 26 Council Meeting, 17-18 February 1945, CAW). This partly reflected the fact that Communists did not control the top leadership of the UAW in Canada, but it may also have reflected divisions among Communists. Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin emphasize the divisions among Communists in the UAW and other unions in the US over the no-strike issue in "'Red' Unions and 'Bourgeois' Contracts?" *American Journal of Sociology*, 96, 5 (1991), 1184-8).

earlier UAW organizing efforts. Ford Windsor and most other UAW locals in Canada and the US in the late 1930's and early 1940's had been organized to an important extent on the basis of workers inside the plants.³⁷ In contrast, Taylor now organized from outside the fence. Instead of the workers organizing the union with some assistance from UAW officials, the UAW officials organized plants with assistance from some of the workers.

Times had changed in other respects, too. Although it has been argued that the move to Oakville was a union-avoidance tactic,³⁸ there is evidence that Ford merely wanted to delay unionization and hinder the creation of a master agreement covering all UAW locals in Canada. Although anti-union sentiment remained, Ford of Canada had pragmatically accepted the UAW by this time.³⁹ Taylor was "confidentially told that we [Ford management] want your union in there." So it puzzled him that he still had to organize the local. "We've got the support of all of Ford U.S.," so why not transfer the contract at Windsor to Oakville? "Let's both live together," Taylor advised management. He asked Ford to accept the UAW immediately "as responsible, good citizens of a community and employees of a damn good company."⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Ford opposed the transfer of the Windsor agreement, in large part because it would create a single agreement for the two locals which the more numerous Local 200, with its history of militancy and solidarity, would dominate. Furthermore, transfer of the Windsor contract to Oakville would constrain Ford's flexibility to organize work and assign jobs while the plant was gearing up for full production.

It was not only management who opposed transferring the Windsor agreement. Many who hired on at Oakville, but did not come from Ford Windsor, saw such a contract transfer as a major threat to their job security and promotion prospects. The estimated 3800 Windsor jobs that would be cut constituted far more than the total workforce at Oakville.⁴¹ A retired worker recalled that since many Windsor workers had over ten years' seniority, "us fellas who started [at Oakville] had visions of masses of Windsor workers coming down."⁴² The Canadian UAW backed Local 200's demand that those who transferred from Windsor be guaranteed "the

³⁷ Obvious examples include locals organized through sitdowns in 1936-37 by a minority of the workforce. Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism* (Princeton 1977), 114-8; and Sidney Fine, *Sit-Down* (Ann Arbor 1969), 142-4, 168, 251.

³⁸ Yates, *From Plant to Politics*, 87.

³⁹ "[M]utual respect and understanding" grew between the UAW and Ford after the 1945 strike. C.W.M. Hart, "Industrial Relations Research and Social Theory," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 15 (February-November 1949), 66. On Ford's relation to the UAW in the US, see H.J. Harris, *The Right to Manage* (Madison 1982), 148, 168.

⁴⁰ Interview, Jack Taylor, 26 May 1977.

⁴¹ *UAW Brief to Board of Conciliation*, Windsor Ontario, 9 June 1954, 109, L707.

⁴² Interview, Howard Kitchen, first Secretary Treasurer of Local 707, 25 September 1993.

right to their jobs at Oakville consistent with their seniority."⁴³ But the Oakville workers insisted that transfer rights be limited to those with specific experience relevant to the jobs they were to take in Oakville.⁴⁴ Thus in this respect many Oakville workers were aligned with management against their own union.

In other respects, there was a great deal of cooperation between management and the union. For example, Taylor helped management recruit skilled tradespeople from Windsor because Ford Oakville "was shy on trades and there were a lot of employers who needed skilled trades people."⁴⁵ And during the certification campaign, organizers were permitted to sign up members openly in the plant during lunch and other breaks. Unlike organizing at Local 200 in the late 1930s and early 1940s when workers could be fired for such activities,⁴⁶ at Oakville there was little fear of signing union cards.⁴⁷ The experience of one worker who joined the UAW during his first day on the job was typical: "I wasn't in the plant I would say two hours when [an organizer] come over to me and says 'how'd you like to have an application for the union?' I says 'fine.' He says 'gimme a dollar.'"⁴⁸ Most workers saw unionization as a foregone conclusion. "If you didn't join," another retiree recalled thinking, "later on you'd probably have to pay the dues whether you joined or not, eh?" Management's decision not to oppose union recognition meant that the workers did not undergo the kind of politicization that recognition battles had created in the 1930s and early 1940s.

⁴³Letter from Jack Taylor, President of Local 200, to George Burt, 22 October 1952 (WSU, UAW Canada Locals, Box 88, Folder 12.) Local 200 had passed a resolution that "those about to be displaced be guaranteed the right to exercise their seniority either in Oakville or with operations remaining in Windsor."

Burt explained the union's view:

We did not agree to the manner in which the employees were transferred from Windsor to Oakville because we requested the company to transfer them according to seniority on the basis of applications received by the company. ... [Ford] ... selected the employees ... and then endeavoured to say that they were selected according to seniority.

Letter from George Burt to Roy Dymond, President of Local 707, 4 November 1960, WSU, UAW Canada Locals, Acc. 372, Box 102, Folder 4.

⁴⁴Letter from George Burt to UAW Local unions and staff, 27 October 1954, WSU, UAW Canada Locals, Box 80, Folder 1.

⁴⁵Interview, Jack Taylor, 26 September 1993.

⁴⁶Interview, Bill Walsh (union organizer for the Communist Party at Ford Windsor in 1939), 14 July 1994.

⁴⁷Of 15 retired workers interviewed for this study, only two recalled that they had had any reluctance to sign up. Taylor reported that some were reluctant to join the union before their three month probation period ended (Report of Organizing, 23 June 1953, WSU, UAW Canada Officers, Box 66 Folder 1).

⁴⁸A former local president reported that he signed a union card on his first day in the plant. Pat Clancy, "Local 707 is Forty Years Old," *707 Reporter* (September 1993), 7.

Although there were fears that Ford wanted to avoid hiring union militants,⁴⁹ Oakville managers made no serious effort to exclude unionists from the plant. Fully a quarter of fourteen hundred workers hired at Oakville by September 1953 came from Windsor.⁵⁰ Some three hundred unionists from Brantford (including many UAW members from the Massey plant) were hired, together with members of the UAW and other CIO unions from heavily unionized areas of Toronto and Hamilton.⁵¹ Ford also hired at least forty former workers, including many union activists, from a left-wing local of the National Union of Pottery Workers (CCL) in Hamilton.⁵² All of this is consistent with Taylor's observation that "top management ... wanted the union in there."⁵³

Also in contrast to the organizing of Local 200 in 1941,⁵⁴ the certification of Local 707 did not reflect widespread and strong grievances against management. Although there were complaints of speedup,⁵⁵ the pace was nowhere near that of full production.⁵⁶ In terms of wages and benefits, Oakville workers were already on a par with Ford Windsor. In effect, they enjoyed the economic benefits of a UAW agreement without paying union dues. Moreover, labour-management conflicts were reduced by links between workers and supervisors from Windsor. A retired worker recalled that Windsor supervisors normally "weren't on your back" because they "were older and they understood a man." Another recalled that "all [supervisors] that came down from Windsor" were well liked. On the other hand, some workers who had not come from Windsor saw the ties between workers and supervisors from Windsor as management favouritism.

At the same time, because there were only about two thousand workers in the Oakville plant by the time Local 707 was certified (compared to about fourteen thousand at Local 200 during the war), workers found "more of a homely atmos-

⁴⁹Yates, *From Plant to Politics*, 87.

⁵⁰Letter from Rhys Sale, President of Ford of Canada, to the Windsor employees of Ford, 26 September 1953, WSU, UAW Canada, Companies, Box 132, Folder 5. Another 19 transferred from a Ford parts depot in Etobicoke organized by the UAW (Letter from Jack Taylor to George Burt, 17 February 1955, WSU, UAW Canada Officers, Box 66, Folder 1.

⁵¹Report by Jack Taylor, 6 October 1953, WSU, UAW Canada Officers, Box 132, Folder 5; Interviews with Bill Van Gaal, President of Local 707, 14 June 1993; Howard Kitchen; Jack Taylor, 26 September 1993.

⁵²Interview, Rod McNeil (a member of Local 707, now retired, who helped found the local and has been active in the local ever since), 14 November 1994.

⁵³Taylor reported help from all levels of management, but especially from those who had transferred from Windsor (Interview 26 May 1977).

⁵⁴Houlahan, "A History of Collective Bargaining in Local 200 UAW"; Cako, "Labour's Struggle for Union Security."

⁵⁵Jack Taylor, Oakville Report, 26 November 1953, WSU, UAW Canada Officers, Box 66, Folder 1.

⁵⁶When the first car was assembled on 11 May 1953, the plant was making only nine cars a day, one retired worker recalled.

phere" at Oakville, as one retiree put it. Supervision tended to be less obtrusive at Oakville in this period, and in some areas the workers supervised themselves, although conflict with supervisors also existed.⁵⁷

In Windsor, many Ford workers had forged solidarity not only through working together but also by living in the same working-class communities. In contrast, most Oakville workers had few ties with each other outside of work. Those who did have ties to fellow workers outside the plant were mainly linked to workers in their own particular locales, such as Brantford. This reflected the way the company recruited workers. Ford hired workers from a wide geographic range, from southern Ontario centres such as Windsor, Brantford, Toronto and Hamilton, and from much further away, including centres such as North Bay, Montréal, Ottawa and other areas.⁵⁸ Less than ten per cent of the workforce was from the Oakville area.⁵⁹ Residential diffusion was reinforced by a dearth of affordable housing in Oakville which prompted workers to commute long distances.⁶⁰ Since there was less socializing among workers after work than was typical among workers at Ford Windsor, Taylor had to correspond with "key men" in several locales.⁶¹ Ford's Oakville workforce was also fragmented by growing ethnic heterogeneity. As noted, this reflected recent immigration from Eastern Europe in particular.⁶²

The long hiring process also hindered development of a union consciousness. Although the local was certified by a vote of ninety-five per cent of the workers,⁶³ Ford hired a great many workers after the certification. As a result, by the time of the first contract strike at Oakville in 1954, only about half the 3200 workers in the plant had had an opportunity to vote to join the UAW.⁶⁴ Although they were eligible for strike benefits, those who were not members of the union were not eligible to vote for local leaders or the strike, or to ratify the contract.

⁵⁷See, for example, the grievance of E. Wiskin, a steward fired for "using abusive language to the supervisor," and that of A. Petrusaitis, found guilty of criminal assault on a supervisor, *Arbitrator's Report*, 5 March 1956, UAW Canada Companies, Box 133, Folder 7, WSU.

⁵⁸Jack Taylor, "Oakville Report," March 1953, WSU, UAW Canada Officers, Box 66, File 1.

⁵⁹*Oakville Daily Journal Record*, 11 May 1963, 2.

⁶⁰As late as 1963, Ford Oakville workers resided in 131 cities, towns, villages and hamlets, in 16 counties. *Ibid.*

⁶¹Report by Jack Taylor, 26 November 1953, WSU, UAW Canada Officers, Box 66, Folder 1.

⁶²A local leader noted that there was a "big mix" in the ethnic composition of the plant from the start, including many Polish and Ukrainian "DPs" (displaced persons). Interview, Rod MacNeil, 23 September 1994.

⁶³The board denied the UAW's first application because the workforce was about to double in size, but the second application was unopposed. Taylor reported that 1850 of 2100 employees signed union cards before the second vote. He argued that Ford opposed the first application so that supervisors could allocate jobs without seniority restrictions, WSU, UAW Canada Officers, Box 66, Folder 1.

⁶⁴*The State of the Union*, Region 7, UAW-CIO, May 1954, L707.

Most important of all, the members' identification with the local was weakened by the ongoing centralization of power in the UAW. From the outset, Local 707 was highly dependent on the national and international levels of the UAW. In part, this dependency developed because many members and local leaders were "green" to the UAW and to organized labour generally. They depended on the International to help resolve election disputes, settle dues issues, and approve local bylaws, primarily because of the many precedents which had built up. These regulations were part of the UAW hierarchy's control over local leaders and members.⁶⁵

Local 707 was also subordinated to the UAW's broader bargaining strategy. Because the UAW wanted to create one basic agreement covering Ford locals in Windsor and Etobicoke too, Local 707 had to wait for these contracts to expire. For several months after certification the local was "very dead and very cautious," Taylor recalled. A retired worker, who had been the secretary-treasurer of the local at the time, reported that it was hard to get more than one or two hundred to attend membership meetings and that local UAW leaders "had to educate them about the union."⁶⁶ Yet there was a reasonable turnout in the fall of 1953 at a special general members' meeting called to elect the local executive.⁶⁷ Indicative of the internal, often geographically-based divisions, members from Brantford, Hamilton and Windsor met separately to select candidates from their respective areas before nominating them at the meeting.⁶⁸ The Brantford group, which included many workers from UAW locals in the area, was especially prominent on this first local executive.⁶⁹

In the months prior to the first contract, there were no elected union representatives in the plant. Because of this, and because the local executive board had no contractual status, Taylor had a great deal of control over the local. Inside the plant, Taylor's influence was extended through an unofficial cadre of "key men" who became the nucleus of official in-plant union representation (committeemen and stewards) later on.⁷⁰ Taylor acted essentially as an unofficial labour-relations officer, policing over-zealous supervisors and mediating conflicts. He was helped by Windsor contacts who were "in pretty influential [management] positions," and he gave them specific advice on labour-relations issues. For example, he told management:

⁶⁵ On the development of passive reliance by American locals on UAW leaders, see Jefferys, *Management and Managed*, 27, 30-3, 104.

⁶⁶ Interview, Howard Kitchen, 25 September 1993.

⁶⁷ Interview, Ernest Tremblay, former Secretary-Treasurer of Local 707, 25 September 1993.

⁶⁸ Interview, Howard Kitchen, 25 September 1993.

⁶⁹ Hiring from Brantford farm implement plants such as Massey's and White's reflected the cyclical nature of demand and layoffs due to retooling. Interview, Rod McNeil, 14 November 1994.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

"Look, you know, cut out this stuff, for Christ's sake! I'm telling you that that new [supervisor] that you got in paint that was hired from Toronto is a smart-ass ... Now step on this guy."

"Even though legally ... we couldn't sit down with the boss and talk about the problem, we got to them," Taylor explained. Pointing to various labour issues in the plant, he would chide management for not transferring the Windsor agreement:

"All you had to do was recognize us from day one and maybe we would've been able to sit down more intelligently with some responsibility on our part and really get into this god-damned thing. But, gees, you didn't do it. Now we're into a bit of a law of the jungle here."

Enter the UAW to civilize the jungle. On September 12, 1954, an estimated 500 members authorized the local executive to conduct a strike vote if negotiations were not successful. At a special meeting two weeks later, 86 per cent of those attending voted to authorize the strike.⁷¹ However, only about half the 3,800 members attended this meeting. Only an estimated 150 members attended other meetings called to decide the contract priorities. One interpretation was that the Oakville workers "just wanted what the Windsor workers had," recalled a retired worker who was a member of the local executive during the strike.⁷² George Burt, the Director of the Canadian UAW, had another view of what the Oakville workers wanted, however. He reported to the conciliation board that the Oakville workers were "not prepared to accept 'holus bolus' the conditions negotiated at Windsor, without having something to say about it."⁷³ In this he was prescient.

The Long Strike

THE STRIKE BEGAN October 15, 1954, the same day that Hurricane Hazel, the worst hurricane in Canadian history, struck. By November, the two Ford locals at Windsor and a parts depot in Etobicoke, near Toronto, were also on strike. In contrast to Windsor in 1945, there were no mass pickets. Ever since the war, the nature of UAW strikes had been changing to what labour historian Martin Halpern describes as "the new-fashioned, stay-at-home, wait-it-out strike."⁷⁴ Since Ford was not going to try to break the strike, Taylor remembers UAW leaders telling "a

⁷¹There was a 96 per cent strike vote at Local 200. Letter from Jack Taylor to George Burt, 29 March 1956, UAW Canada, Officers, Box 66, Folder 1, WSU; *United Auto Worker*, Canadian edition, October 1954, Archives of the Ford Motor Company, Oakville, ON. Hereafter FMC. The strike decision at Local 707 "came in and it all took place so easy you hardly knew that it had taken place," recalled one retiree.

⁷²Interview, Howard Kitchen, 25 September 1993.

⁷³*UAW Brief to the Board of Conciliation*, Windsor Ontario, 5 June 1954, 7, L707.

⁷⁴Martin Halpern, *UAW Politics in the Cold War Era* (Albany 1988), 78.

hell of a lot of people to stay away. “[We] [j]ust kept a few on the gates.” Workers were advised to look for jobs so they would not be a burden to the strike fund.

Gone, too, was the mass action and the solidarity from workers outside the local that characterized the 1945 Windsor strike.⁷⁵ Also absent was most of the picket line militancy. A former chief of police for Oakville recollected that there were few picket line incidents such as scratched cars or “professional fallers” trying to stop vehicles entering the plant.⁷⁶ Also in contrast to 1945, the UAW now protected the plant rather than use the threat of damage as bargaining leverage.⁷⁷ Taylor explained:

... we shut it down gradually, eh? We left people in there to watch it so it didn't lead to any damage and we kept heat in the place. ... We sat down with the company and said “well, we have let certain people in. There's electrical motors that are underground. Overhead there's air-conditioning refrigeration. There's fire insurance. And we will work with your security people in this thing.” And we permitted some supervisors to go in, too, you know.⁷⁸

Despite this union-management cooperation, many strikers put up with considerable economic hardship. Strike pay was low and many found it difficult to get by.⁷⁹ The spouse of the first local president recalled that when he was at negotiations, her family “was lucky because [he] wasn't eating at home.”⁸⁰ Those who needed more could obtain union vouchers to help pay their rent, heating, utilities, transportation, etc.,⁸¹ but hardships were by no means eliminated. The local arranged for a finance company to help those who had good credit ratings meet their car

⁷⁵Oakville, with its polo grounds, exclusive private boys' school, ‘millionaires’ row’ of estates along the shore of Lake Ontario, and the highest per capita income in Canada at the time, was anything but a union town. So even though the strike was largely invisible, and the plant was located six miles outside of town, there was public hostility.

⁷⁶He estimated that there were normally fifty to seventy five picketers. Interview, Fred Oliver, 14 June 1993. Windsor was the same in this respect: “Gone was the sense of fighting to the death that had characterized the famous Ford strike nine years earlier ...” Fraser, “Years of Struggle,” 172.

⁷⁷David Moulton, “Ford Windsor 1945,” in Abella, ed., *On Strike*, 138-9.

⁷⁸This contrasts with the use of the Ford power house as a hostage during negotiations in 1945 in Windsor. *Ibid.*

⁷⁹Reports of the exact amount of strike pay vary. One retired worker reported benefits of ten dollars a week for single workers and sixteen dollars a week for those with families. Another said the strike pay was six dollars a week for single workers, twelve for a married couple, and an additional \$3.15 for each dependent child.

⁸⁰Interview, Ms. Fred Childs, 25 September 1993.

⁸¹Letter from H. Kitchen Financial Secretary, Local 707, to E. Mazey, Secretary Treasurer, International UAW, 21 January 1955, UAW Regional Office, Acc. 372, file 3, WSU. In order to receive any rental or mortgage subsidy, the union required a worker to submit a notice of eviction or foreclosure (Interview, Rod McNeil, 14 November 1994).

payments, but there were many repossessions.⁸² Local activists visited union locals and labour councils across Canada to obtain strike donations and moral support.⁸³ The spouses of the local president and Taylor, the UAW representative, prepared food for the picketers.⁸⁴ And it was not out of character for supervisors to donate directly to the strike fund. Taylor recalled that some of them “got a hold of me and asked if they could put a twenty dollar grocery order on some striker’s kitchen table.”

Meanwhile, contract negotiations dragged on in the boardrooms of Toronto’s expensive Royal York Hotel. According to George Burt, director of the Canadian region of the UAW, the strike issues were “not earth-shaking” since most had been gained in other UAW contracts. Except for protesting management’s reorganization of departments and the contracting out of some jobs, the UAW did not oppose the language Ford proposed concerning management’s rights to control production.⁸⁵ The main bargaining demands were a 15 cent wage increase and fully paid medical and hospital insurance with family coverage.⁸⁶ As Samuel Gompers would have put it, the UAW wanted ‘more.’

Although other demands included contract language against sex discrimination and also a union role in the apprenticeship program⁸⁷, these had little priority.⁸⁸ According to Taylor, even the issue of union representation in the workplace had low priority.⁸⁹ Management wanted a ‘committeeman’ structure which would have meant a lower density of union representation than the alternative ‘steward’ structure.⁹⁰ Because stewards have smaller constituencies than committeemen, they tend to be closer to the members. A worker who served on the negotiating committee stated that there was pressure from the International UAW leaders to

⁸²Interview, Howard Kitchen, 25 September 1993.

⁸³Interview, Rod McNeil, 14 November 1994.

⁸⁴Interview, Ms. Fred Childs, 25 September 1993.

⁸⁵*Submission of the Ford Motor Company of Canada, Ontario Assembly Plant, in Conciliation Proceedings with UAW-CIO Local 707, 9, 25 L707, Box “Local 707 History 55-Present.”*

⁸⁶Letter from George Burt to UAW locals and staff, 27 October 1954, WSU, UAW Canada Officers, Box 80, Folder 1.

⁸⁷Interview, George Peckham, Industrial Relations manager at Ford of Canada. Fraser, “Years of Struggle,” 169. The school was “negotiated out of existence” in 1957. *Ibid.*, 175.

⁸⁸Ford’s response to the latter demand was a classic case of systemic discrimination: “There are no female workers in the bargaining unit at Oakville so that question does not arise.” *Submission of the Ford Motor Company of Canada, Oakville Assembly Plant, in Conciliation Proceedings with UAW-CIO Local 707, 1954, 229, L707, Box “Local 707 History 55 — Present.”*

⁸⁹Interview, Jack Taylor, 26 May 1977.

⁹⁰This would have meant one committeeperson for each 300 workers. *Brief to Union Local 707, UAW-CIO, from Ford Motor Company of Canada Ltd., Oakville Assembly Plant, n.d., 60-2, L707.*

accept the committeeman structure. However, the local negotiating committee compromised and called for a combined steward and committeeman structure. Relative to the committeeman structure, this hybrid helped reduce the distance between plant leaders and members and made it somewhat more difficult for managers and top UAW leaders to control the local and its members.

Significantly, the most serious bargaining conflict was not between the union and management but between the Oakville and Windsor locals (the latter supported by senior UAW leaders) over transfer rights for the workers laid off from the Windsor plant. The conflict was also internal to Local 707, between workers who had transferred from Windsor and those who had not. This job competition was worsened by a 15 per cent decline in employment in the auto industry in Canada in 1954-55, as the economy adjusted to the end of the Korean War.

Management had refused a national agreement covering all Ford locals (including small plants in Winnipeg, Calgary and Burnaby, B.C.) because it would create a national seniority system⁹¹ and require bargaining across provincial jurisdictions.⁹² The UAW then demanded a province-wide agreement.⁹³ The union argued that a provincial agreement would be "in the interest of harmonious relations" because it would preclude a plant (such as Oakville) striking and thus closing down other plants (such as Windsor) due to the interdependent nature of assembly production.⁹⁴ However, Local 707 remained adamantly opposed to province-wide transfer rights. This opposition was initially expressed in the local's demand that if an employee transferred to another Ford plant, the worker's seniority would begin with the starting date of work at the new plant (except with respect to fringe benefits such as the pension plan).⁹⁵ Local 707 later amended its demand to read:

the employees affected shall be given the right to transfer ... but shall not have seniority rights for the purposes of promotions, demotions, layoffs and recall.⁹⁶

⁹¹Fraser, "Years of Struggle," 169.

⁹²*Submission of the Ford Motor Company of Canada, Ontario Assembly Plant, in Conciliation Proceedings with UAW-CIO Local 707*, 21, L707, Box "Local 707 History 55-Present."

⁹³Letter from Emil Mazey, George Burt and Charles Macdonald, UAW, to Rhys Sale, Ford of Canada, 14 December 1954, WSU, UAW Canada Companies, Box 131, Folder 1.

⁹⁴*UAW Brief to Board of Conciliation Windsor, Ontario*, 9 June 1954, 7, L707.

⁹⁵Jean L. Landry, "Notes on Proposed #3 Agreement," Local 707 Executive Board Member, April 1954, L707.

⁹⁶*Brief to Union Local 707, UAW-CIO, from the Ford Motor Company of Canada Ltd., Ontario Assembly Plant*, May 1954, 23, L707.

However, the UAW's brief to the conciliation board reflected the dominance of Local 200. It opposed Local 707's position, stating that anything "other than Company-wide seniority ... would not be acceptable."⁹⁷

Furthermore, whereas Local 200 had earlier enjoyed considerable autonomy in collective bargaining, Local 707 was subordinated to higher levels of the UAW. The Ford Council, a consultative body consisting of leaders from the five Ford locals in Ontario, set up a Master Committee to deal with issues that were common to all the locals. Leaders of Local 707 did not play a central role on the Committee. One member of Local 707's bargaining committee recollected that he and his fellow committee members "followed [Taylor] around like a little dog." Except for Local 707's president, the bargaining committee was not involved in "inner sanctum" negotiation meetings. "We weren't in when they were talking," he reported. "There was no need for us. They'd tell us what happens and we'd go back to the picket line and say what's going on."⁹⁸

Because Canadian UAW Director George Burt was ill, he asked the International UAW for help. International UAW President, Walter Reuther, and 'Cashbox' Emil Mazey, International UAW Secretary Treasurer, negotiated the master agreement. Although Taylor handled seniority, representation and other clauses which were more local in nature, the International UAW leaders negotiated many local issues as well.⁹⁹ "Alright," Taylor recalled Mazey explaining to Local 707's bargaining committee, "this is where we're at on the insurance issue. These are our top priorities. Look, we're gonna have to make a change in seniority ..." The local bargaining committee did not insist on a more responsible role because "very few of us had any idea" about collective bargaining, one member explained, so we "had to take most of it from Windsor."

While collective bargaining dragged on at the Royal York, the morale of the picketers who had been outside the Oakville plant throughout the long winter months declined. At first, spirits had been high. "A lot of us, we enjoyed the outing," a picketer remembered. "It was better than sitting home. Five or six fellas around talking and joking, and then after we did get the [strike] trailer, we'd sit and play cards." But as the winter wore on, economic pressures grew. Poker in the trailer went from a ten cent ante and 25 cent bump to a one cent ante and three cent bump. Increasingly, the picket lines were made up of those who, having failed to find jobs, came out so they could qualify for strike pay. "After people found out that [the UAW] was giving out some [strike] benefits ... they started coming in and doing picket duty," one retired worker explained. Those under greater financial pressure thus tended to be both more active picketers and more discontented. The secretary

⁹⁷UAW Brief to Board of Conciliation, Windsor, Ontario, 9 June 1954, 48, L707.

⁹⁸Interview, Howard Kitchen, 25 September 1993.

⁹⁹Fraser, "Years of Struggle," 173; Letter from George Burt to all Ford Locals, 30 April 1951, WSU, UAW Canada Locals, Box 88, Folder 11. On the centralization of the UAW in this period, see Jack Stieber, *Governing the UAW* (New York 1962), 131-42.

treasurer of the local (at the time of the strike) remembered that “a lot of guys ... were pretty desperate” and anxious to get back to work.¹⁰⁰ He informed the International that over two hundred members had recently signed up for strike benefits. Hearing rumours of a settlement, “perhaps they feel if they do not participate in the strike it might have some effect on their status when we do return to work.” More joined the union in order to qualify for strike benefits.¹⁰¹

These pressures generated frustrations which some took out on local leaders. A picketer illustrated this growing tension:

One night we was doing picket duty and we was all setting in the little trailer there and a couple of guys come in and we knew that they were [local union leaders] ... They drove right into the plant and they turned around and drove back out and nobody went out of the trailer because the morale among the union members then was pretty low. And they ... come in the trailer ... “Why wasn’t you fellas out there? ... Anybody could go in there and go to work and you fellas ... you don’t care.” And someone spoke up and they said “that’s right, we don’t.” One fella, he got pretty nasty ... Got up, told [the local leader] to shut up, get out before you’re thrown out.

A back-to-work movement arose, and there was a petition to “throw the union out.” Although a former bargaining committee member derided the supporters of this movement as “company stooges,” a retired rank and filer felt they were “just a bunch of ordinary workers.” He recalled that from then on local leaders “started trying to butter us up a bit.” Discontents were expressed at several membership meetings. A strike activist who attended a meeting of about five hundred members in Hamilton, reported:

[The strikers] were arguing that we’d been out long enough and I guess the thing was that a majority had never belonged to a union before. [They were] as green as I was. And of course some people asked [International UAW Secretary-Treasurer] Emil Mazey what his salary was, and [objected] “it’s all right for you to sit back there, you’re getting yours.”

These membership meetings were “very hot.” The most contentious issue still concerned seniority transfer. Shouting boos and catcalls, members interrupted leaders who defended the transfer. Despite distress over the length of the strike, some threatened to continue the strike if the contract offer contained a transfer clause.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰Interview, Howard Kitchen, 25 September 1993.

¹⁰¹Letter from H. Kitchen to E. Mazey, 21 January 1955, UAW Regional Office. Acc. 372, file 3, WSU.

¹⁰²Taylor recalled workers at a meeting telling negotiators, “Don’t ever bring back here a settlement that the Windsor fellas are gonna have their seniority because we’re telling you that if you do, we’re gonna keep Oakville out.” Interview, 26 May 1977.

However, as Christmas passed into the New Year, ratification of the contract became a certainty. Both the union and the strikers were now financially pinched. In addition to the 7,000 Ford workers on strike in Ontario, 3,000 Massey-Harris workers were on strike, and another 5,000 UAW members were on layoff. The UAW's financial burden gave it a strong incentive to settle. George Burt reported that "unemployment obviously is the most serious problem facing our union...."¹⁰³ Yet Ford's financial position remained strong.¹⁰⁴

The Economic Contract

FOUR MONTHS after the strike began, Local 707 held a meeting to consider a tentative contract. Although there had been several membership meetings to discuss the negotiations, this was the first time many members heard much that was substantive.¹⁰⁵ There was considerable dissatisfaction with the offer¹⁰⁶ because the UAW had won province-wide transfer rights.¹⁰⁷ On top of this, George Burt offended many Oakville workers when he told them the Windsor workers had handed them the contract on a "silver platter." The boos were deafening.¹⁰⁸

The UAW also obtained wage-and-benefit gains that put Canadian members on a rough par with UAW contracts in the US.¹⁰⁹ There was one major difference, however. Whereas UAW members at Ford in the US obtained the celebrated Guaranteed Annual Wage, which paid the difference between unemployment

¹⁰³UAW-CIO Region 7, *State of the Union*, May 1954, 1, L707.

¹⁰⁴Ford won 3/4 of the increase in Canadian demand for vehicles in 1952, and 1/2 the increase in 1953, *Supplementary Information, Conciliation Proceedings Between Ford Motor Company of Canada and the UAW*, 26 March 1954, 25, L707.

¹⁰⁵A retiree: "They didn't keep too many of us posted on things 'til right up to the last when they ... called a meeting ... and told us this and that and whether we should accept the contract."

¹⁰⁶One who thought the contract offer "reasonable" said "a lot ... thought they shoulda got better."

¹⁰⁷Fraser, "Years of Struggle," 175.

¹⁰⁸Unemployment fed this job competition: between 1955-59 over 6000 jobs, 22.5 per cent of the workforce, were lost in the Canadian auto industry. *UAW Brief to the Royal Commission on the Automobile Industry*, 24 October 1960, 6, CAW.

¹⁰⁹The contract included fully paid family medical and hospital insurance; 4 cents an hour wage increase; Rand formula; 8 cents cost-of-living increase; 3 weeks paid vacation after 15 years; 1 extra paid holiday; 4 hours pay for shifts cancelled or shortened at short notice; life insurance for retirees; and an arbitration panel. *Minutes of Settlement, Ford Motor Company of Canada and UAW Locals 707, 200, and 584*, January 1955, NA, MG 28 I119, Acc. 84/47, Box 6, 31-2; Letter from Thomas Maclean, Assistant Director UAW Region 7 to UAW locals, 1 February 1955, WSU, UAW Locals, Box 80, Folder 2; Letter from George Burt, 27 October 1954, WSU, UAW Canada Locals, Box 80, Folder 1.

insurance and the normal wage during layoffs, Canadian workers did not.¹¹⁰ Although an overall majority (of the combined votes of the three locals) ratified the contract, many Oakville workers were dissatisfied. The spouse of one striker explained that "a lot of workers voted [to accept the contract] because they were desperate. It had gone on so long that they were at wits' end corners." If the Oakville workers had voted down the contract, it would have been accepted anyway, because the Windsor workers, most of whom favoured the contract, vastly outnumbered the Oakville members.

The strike thus ended with a mixture of relief and resentment. The members of Local 707 had signed union cards, elected a local executive, given them a strike mandate, and gone on strike throughout the cold winter, but they had been frozen out of most key decisions, including contract negotiations. They voted on a contract they had not seen before and were angered that the UAW overrode their objection to seniority transfer from Windsor.¹¹¹ They returned to their repetitive, never-ending Taylorized tasks on the assembly lines and to the same supervisors. But now they had union stewards. Complaints covered by the contract could be filed as a grievance, but once filed, it was out of the workers' hands. And any direct action would violate a contract which was policed by the union as well as management. In return, workers gained some improvements in their wages and benefits. Such was the new unionism.

Conclusion

THE FORMATION OF LOCAL 707 exemplifies the rise of the Wagner model of unionism, the key component of Canada's postwar Fordist compromise. Compared to the direct action at Ford Windsor during the war and to the militancy and solidarity of the 1945 Ford strike, the first contract strike at Ford in Oakville in 1954 was an expression of the remarkably civil relationship which had developed between management and the union. Like 1945, the 1954 strike was long, but it was eerily devoid of the kind of class conflict that breeds deep solidarity and righteousness against management. Unlike 1945, the 1954 strike was not about survival of the union but mostly about monetary details of the contract. And whereas rank-and-file workers were central to decisions about strike tactics and bargaining in 1945, by 1954 most members of the local played only spectator roles.

¹¹⁰ Neither guaranteed nor annual, it provided laid-off workers with four weeks' pay at 65 per cent of weekly pay, including benefits, plus twenty-two weeks at 60 per cent of weekly pay *as long as the fund held up*. Stieber, *Governing the UAW*, 46.

The gains in 1954 were consistent with four main demands of the UAW after the war: higher wages, more benefits, income security and "escape from the job." David Moberg, "Rattling the Golden Chains: Conflict and Consciousness of Autoworkers," PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1978, 65.

¹¹¹ As it turned out, there were fewer transfers from Oakville than many had feared, so the transfer of seniority was less of a burden to most Oakville workers than they had anticipated.

Many made sacrifices during the strike and struggled to support their families. Some picketed for long hours. Some attended information meetings to hear reports from union leaders concerning the contract talks. But for the most part they looked on while decisions were made for them, often by senior union leaders they did not know and had not elected. By now, initiative in their own organization had passed almost entirely from the hands of these unionized workers.

Even though the interests of the larger and established Local 200 dominated contract bargaining in 1954, the logic of a provincial agreement was to centralize power in the hands of union leaders above the local level. This was part of the shift from a more member-centred and local-centred unionism to a top-down, bureaucratic union structure. Greater centralization was also conducive to building a more cohesive industrial consciousness among union members, in this case an "autoworker" identity. However, in the context of the Wagner model this identity was less likely to be a developmental step in the direction of class consciousness. A potentially transformative class politics might have developed out of struggles centred on production (e.g. challenging the prerogative of management to impose key aspects of Taylorism). Instead, the new unionism was largely confined to struggles around marginal modifications to the distribution of profits. In effect, Wagner unionism fostered a politics of consumption it could satisfy, at least for a time.

In the context of the increasing depoliticization and working-class fragmentation in the 1950s, greater union centralization had contradictory implications for the power of organized labour. Left to rely on their own resources, individual union locals would have been more vulnerable to managerial and state coercion. Without a certain stability of membership and finances, the UAW as a whole would also have been much more vulnerable to employer aggression. Yet, in the context of the Wagner model, the union was hamstrung by the very compromises that gave it the stability and legal legitimacy it needed. Moreover, the UAW leaders became more and more cut off from, indeed opposed to, the militancy and solidarity that gave vitality and moral impetus to the union. In this period, a more dynamic unionism, the sort workers created at Local 200 during the war, would have required both a continuing mobilization in the workplace to challenge management control, and a central union structure to coordinate, consolidate and politicize these rank and file initiatives on an ongoing basis. This is precisely what did not happen.

Except for certain limits to managerial prerogatives, such as detailed job classifications and seniority rules, by this time the union regarded management's overall control of the labour process as non-negotiable. Indeed, the union's commitment not to allow Taylorist productivity gains to be jeopardized by work stoppages was the prime precondition of the entire Wagner model. In addition to the coercive power of management and the state which lay in reserve, the union's agreement to use the grievance procedure as a substitute for direct action for the duration of the contract was the main guarantee that management control of the

labour process would not be challenged. As union leaders took responsibility for maintaining industrial peace after the war, they made a priority out of issues that could easily be monetized, such as wages and pensions. They therefore weakened any potential to make gains in areas such as working conditions which would have pitted them against management control. The Wagner model thus vitiated class politics by limiting conflicts between 'us and them' to the distribution of productivity gains. Labour-management adversarialism was not eliminated, but the UAW helped to focus worker discontent on a narrower economism. At the same time, while the UAW leaders did not articulate serious demands to limit managerial rights to control production, neither did the members.¹¹² As long as postwar rates of economic growth continued, this Wagner model unionism was a 'win-win' recipe for industrial-relations stability.

Potential for the development of class consciousness and action was further undermined because Wagner model bargaining focussed on individual workplaces and companies rather than the provincial or national economy. In contrast to bargaining organized around class interests, as under stronger variants of Fordism elsewhere, workers' immediate material interests appeared to depend more on the fortunes of 'their' workplaces or firms than on the power and influence of the working class as a whole. The emphasis that the UAW placed on health insurance in the 1954 Ford negotiations, for example, would not have been necessary under a more social democratic Fordism.

The new unionism was also conditioned by a restructuring of class identities after the war. Memories of depression privations and of wartime insurgency were receding. The spatial basis of class solidarity also eroded as workers dispersed over a wide commuter range. Whereas most Ford Windsor workers had lived in relatively homogeneous industrial working class communities, the Oakville workers came from many different places and increasingly moved to mixed class suburban tract homes.¹¹³ Class identities were also increasingly fragmented as industrial workforces became more ethnically and racially heterogeneous.¹¹⁴ The biggest factor reshaping class identities, however, was the economic boom which helped legitimate the Fordist compromise. Large sections of the working class, unionized autoworkers not least among them, now enjoyed a level of job security

¹¹²In the US, however, 114,000 of 140,000 Ford workers conducted work stoppages on the day the 1955 contract was announced. The main cause was unresolved local grievances. See Nelson Lichtenstein, "UAW Bargaining Strategy and Shopfloor Conflict: 1946-1970," *Industrial Relations*, (Fall 1985), 370.

¹¹³By the late 1950s only about 12 per cent of Local 707's members lived in the Oakville area. *Oakville Journal*, 10 January 1959. On the suburbanization of Toronto in this period, see S.D. Clark, *The Suburban Society* (Toronto 1966), esp. 111-2.

¹¹⁴A Ford Oakville retiree who immigrated from Europe explained that many workers preferred supervisors with ethnic backgrounds similar to their own: "Maybe a supervisor was Dutch or English ... so he had his group ... if you are German, you like the German, right?"

and a standard of living that was unprecedented in the history of the working class. Although recessions had not been eliminated and there was no resolution to the tyranny of Taylorism, postwar mass consumption was a powerful palliative defining much of the ethos of the new unionism and the industrial working class.

The founding of the Oakville local in the early 1950s exemplifies in microcosm the main features of the impact of the Wagner model on postwar industrial unionism in Canada. A new, hierarchical, legalistic and bureaucratic unionism arose which helped managers pacify and control workers, and excluded most of them from any meaningful participation in their workplaces and in their unions. The heart of Canadian Fordism lies in this change in the nature of unionism.

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In addition to documentary sources and to interviews with local UAW leaders, this study is based on interviews with 15 'rank and file' workers, now retired, who were among the original members of Local 707. To protect the identities of those who asked for anonymity, no names have been used in reference to these interviews.