

CHAPTER FIVE: ORGANIZED LABOR AT THE RICHMOND BRANCH

Previous chapters have described some of the kinds of work performed by shop-floor workers at the Richmond plant, both before and during the war. Much of it was grueling and repetitive work. Moreover, Ford management sometimes treated workers poorly. For these reasons, workers at Richmond, as elsewhere in the U.S., sought to organize themselves into unions so that they could collectively negotiate with their employer concerning wages and working conditions. This chapter describes those efforts by the Richmond workers in the context of union organizing nationwide throughout the auto industry. Shortly after the Richmond workers finally brought Ford to recognize their union in 1941, the U.S. entered World War II, issuing in a new set of working-place issues, which this chapter also describes. As in the rest of the country, the war changed the employment landscape in Richmond, and many more women joined the workforce. The chapter closes with an overview of the experiences during the war of women workers at the Richmond plant.

A. Organized Labor in the Auto Industry

Ford workers at the Richmond branch formed union organizing committees in January 1937. Their efforts to seek recognition of their union took place in the context of a waves of labor organizing throughout California and the nation in the 1930s. Much of this activity took place because for the first time in U.S. history, with the passage of the Wagner Act in 1935, workers who wanted to organize themselves for purposes of collective bargaining with their employers had the explicit protection of the U.S. government. The Wagner Act established the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), with which workers could register their complaints and seek redress when employers engaged in unfair labor practices. The NLRB defined as unfair such practices as union espionage, supporting company-affiliated unions, imposing sanctions on union members, and refusing to recognize and negotiate with workers' unions. Franklin Roosevelt's re-election in 1936 appeared to be an endorsement of his New Deal programs, including the Wagner Act, which further emboldened workers to organize themselves and the NLRB to protect them. One union that took bold action after the 1936 election was the United Auto Workers (UAW), formed only a year earlier. Early in 1937, 1500 workers in two General Motors plants in Flint, Michigan, enacted a sit-down strike, borrowing a tactic that had worked successfully for meatpackers in Austin, Minnesota, and rubber workers in Akron, Ohio, earlier in the 1930s. The GM workers barricaded themselves in the factories for more than six weeks before GM finally agreed in February to recognize the workers' UAW local and begin negotiations with the UAW for contracts covering workers and locals at GM plants elsewhere in the U.S. as well.¹

¹Nevins and Hill, *Ford: Decline and Rebirth*, 47-50, 133-135; Milton Derber and Edwin Young, *Labor and the New Deal* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972 reprint of 1957 edition by University of Wisconsin Press), 170-172; Steve Babson, *The Unfinished Struggle: Turning Points in American Labor, 1877-Present* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), 95-98.

The GM workers, success had energized others in Detroit and industrial workers elsewhere in the country to use the sit-down to gain recognition of their unions. Within a week of the UAW victory in Flint, 5000 cigar makers in Detroit occupied five plants. A few weeks later, 17,000 strikers occupied all nine of Chrysler's Detroit facilities. In 1937, there were almost 500 strikes in the U.S. that featured sit-downs lasting one day or more. That year, the nation saw a record 4,760 strikes, most of which were aimed at gaining union recognition. Some large corporations recognized unions without a strike. For example, U.S. Steel recognized the Steel Workers Organizing Committee in March 1937 without a strike, agreeing to establish a formal grievance procedure. Later that year, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters gained recognition from the Pullman company, becoming the first African-American union to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement.² California workers in many industries joined this upsurge in efforts to gain recognition. In northern California, for example, cannery workers continued to mount strikes at numerous facilities. It was in this context that UAW Local No. 76, which had recently gained recognition by GM in Oakland, turned its attention to assisting workers at the Ford plant in Richmond to organize.³

Another important facet of the context in which Richmond's UAW local arose was the growing rift between the old American Federal of Labor (AFL) and the new Committee for Industrial Organization (soon to become the Congress of Industrial Organizations, or CIO). The unions that comprised the AFL were old trade unions, each of which represented a particular craft, skill, or trade, like carpenters, machinists, railway conductors, and cigar makers. Each union prided itself in the skills its members possessed, and they often demonstrated little concern for workers who had other skills or for unskilled workers. Therefore, many large industrial enterprises had several groups of workers represented by different unions, often with competing interests, and those enterprises often had another large group of unskilled workers who were not represented by a union at all. Employers had long been able to exploit this lack of unity in the American labor movement, so for decades some labor organizers had advocated industrial unions, which were labor organizations that represented all the workers at a particular plant or in a particular industry regardless of craft, skill, or trade. Early in the twentieth century, the radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) had advocated such an approach to organizing workers, gaining some local footholds among, for example, miners and seasonal construction and agricultural workers. Although most American labor organizations remained trade unions, some, such as the United Mine Workers (UMW) and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (ACW) arose

²Babson, *The Unfinished Struggle*, 98-103.

³The weekly Contra Costa *Labor Journal*, affiliated with the American Federal of Labor (AFL) covered numerous strikes in Contra Costa and nearby counties. From its first issue in June 1937 onward, the San Francisco *Labor Herald*, affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), reported strikes throughout northern California. See also Albert Vetere Lannon, *Fight or Be Slaves: The History of the Oakland-East Bay Labor Movement* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), 77-91; "Truce Holds at Stockton As Canneries Idle after Rioting," *Richmond Independent* (24 April 1937): 1, 6 (photos of Stockton labor violence).

as industrial unions, and locals within the industrial unions represented all workers at facilities where they were organized.⁴

By the early 1930s, many American industrial corporations had become gigantic, employing tens or hundreds of thousands of workers. Despite the hardships of the Great Depression, workers in some industries refused to withstand the hardships placed on them by employers any longer, staging industry-wide strikes to demand recognition of their unions. In 1934, there were strikes among truckers in Minneapolis, cannery workers in California, and dock workers on the San Francisco Bay. The largest such strike involved 350,000 textile workers along the Atlantic seaboard. President Roosevelt and his New Deal allies in Congress, like Sen. Robert Wagner, for whom the Wagner Act was named, recognized that workers had to be enabled to democratically create new representative institutions to counter the power of the giant corporations and thus achieve some balance, in keeping with the republican ideals of the nation. At the same time, some union leaders began to realize that the values of the old AFL were inhibiting the formation of such institutions. Therefore, individuals like John L. Lewis of the UMW and Sidney Hillman of the ACW formed the Committee for Industrial Organization in 1935 to foster a mass organizing drive among industrial workers. The CIO formally broke with the AFL in 1937.⁵ With that break, CIO and AFL unions often competed with each other for the loyalty of workers being organized at large industrial operations, such as Ford's Richmond branch, as will be described below. In Contra Costa County, the Central Trades Labor Council, affiliated with the AFL, sought to force every union affiliated with both the AFL and the CIO to withdraw from the CIO.⁶

Meanwhile, Henry Ford and his top managers, like Harry Bennett and Charles Sorensen, remained the most recalcitrant of the U.S. auto makers. During the spring of 1937, after the UAW had won recognition by GM and was pushing to gain recognition from Chrysler and

⁴David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the 20th Century Struggle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 3-81; Robert H. Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions*, Second Edition (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 3-25.

⁵Nevins and Hill, *Ford: Decline and Rebirth*, 50-51; Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions*, 26-46; Jeremy Brecher, *Strike* (Boston: South End Press, 1972), 150-177; Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 21-48.

⁶Contra Costa *Labor Journal* (19 March 1937): 1. The split between the CIO and the AFL is evident in coverage given organizing activities at the Richmond plant. The AFL-affiliated *Labor Journal* covered the early UAW organizing efforts at the Richmond plant, and it covered the two strikes in 1937, but the *Labor Journal* virtually ignored the UAW's complaint against Ford, filed with the NLRB in early 1938, and it ignored the NLRB's rulings against Ford and in favor of the UAW at the Richmond plant. The CIO-affiliated *Labor Herald*, on the other hand, reported in detail on labor activities at the Richmond plant. In fact, Ford's apparent recognition of UAW Local No. 560 was one of the lead stories on the front page of the *Labor Herald's* inaugural issue of 8 June 1937.

Hudson, Homer Martin, president of the UAW international, announced that the union would launch a drive to get Ford's recognition as well. Ford's lieutenant Harry Bennett responded that, "Organized labor is not going to run the Ford Motor Company." Bennett was so adamantly opposed to dealing with unions that he sent orders to Richmond that Bulwinkel should respond to the sit-down strike in April 1937 (described below) by calling in the sheriff's department. Bulwinkel wanted to avoid the bloodshed that had ensued at other auto industry strikes, so he counselled against using the police. Despite Bennett's insistence, Bulwinkel avoided the call to the sheriff.⁷ Meanwhile, rumors circulated that Ford would close his plants for three years to prevent their being organized. He denied the rumor, but he constantly harangued his workers that they should stay out of unions. The rise in union strength, however, brought dissension to the Ford family. Henry continued to refuse to have anything to do with them, while his son Edsel advocated that the company should try to negotiate an agreement with the unions. Undaunted, the elder Ford vowed to do everything in his power to resist the unions and even work to rescind the Wagner Act. And his company began to employ strong-armed tactics in opposing organizing efforts at its plants in Dearborn, Kansas City, and Dallas, leading to a new term, "the Ford Terror."⁸

B. Richmond Sit-Down Strike of 1937

United Autoworkers of America Local 76 had formed in October 1935 at Oakland. It represented workers at three General Motors plants there. Frank Slaby had been one of the principal organizers, and the members of the local elected him president. Local No. 76 began recruiting members who worked in the automobile, aircraft, and farm implement industries in the Bay Area. Organizers from the local began distributing union literature outside the Ford Motor Company's Richmond branch in November 1936. By January 1937, enough Richmond employees had joined the union that the local formed organizing committees for the Richmond plant. One of the committees met with Ford managers of the Ford plant to register complaints that two union members, A. Gonsolves and A.L. Gullickson, had been fired for joining the union. Although those grievances were resolved informally, conflict continued to simmer as union members began to select shop stewards. Ford demoted some of the shop stewards when it learned of their identities. When a committee of the local met with Ford managers to complain of the demotions, the company responded that it would recognize the union committee and try to resolve the grievances. Meanwhile, however, foremen in the plant began to harass shop stewards, accusing them of being radicals, "Red," and communists. They referred to the president of the local as "Red" Slaby. Foremen tried to convince union members that their

⁷Bennett quoted in "Ford Plants Next in Line for Auto Union Organizers," *Contra Costa Labor Journal* (16 April 1937): 3. See also "The Reminiscences of Clarence Bulwinkel," 35; Nevins and Hill, *Ford: Decline and Rebirth*, 47-54, 135.

⁸"Ford Plants Next in Line for Auto Union Organizers," 3; Nevins and Hill, *Ford: Decline and Rebirth*, 137-139, 150-151. "The Ford Terror" is described in the latter, p 150.

allegiance would hurt them, not help.⁹

It became clear to the union that Ford was not going to recognize the shop stewards the workers at Richmond had selected. Meanwhile, working conditions grew worse in April as Richmond managers rushed meet deadlines in Ford's contract to produce trucks for the Japanese. Shop stewards tried to file complaints with Ford management, but to no avail. Similar tensions were brewing at Ford's Long Beach plant, where the workers staged a sit-down strike in mid-April. A week later, at midday on Friday, 23 April 1937, while plant manager Clarence Bulwinkel was at a Rotary Club lunch and just after Richmond production workers had returned to work from their lunch break, shop stewards, acting on behalf of Local 76, called for a sit-down strike of workers at the Richmond plant to gain Ford's formal recognition of the union. That afternoon, Slaby drove from Oakland to Richmond to take charge of the strike. At 11:00 pm, he announced that Ford had promised to negotiate with union officials. In celebration, workers organized an impromptu midnight parade, said to be five miles long, that wove through the streets of Richmond before processing through Berkeley to Local 76 headquarters in Oakland. Believing they had an agreement in hand, union members agreed to go back to work on Monday, which they did.¹⁰

Two days after the April 1937 sit-down strike at Richmond, Ford officials met with a committee representing the UAW local, including UAW vice president Ed Hall from Detroit. The Ford officials introduced an individual named John Adams, who, the Ford people said, would begin representing the company in labor negotiations. Adams, whose real name was John Gillespie, made certain assurances to the union members. In response the workers ended the strike, believing the company had recognized their union. By late May, however, it became apparent to the workers that Ford had not recognized their union and was not trying to attend to grievances, so the union called a walk-out. At subsequent meetings, the UAW's negotiating committee proposed written agreements under which Ford would recognize the union as the sole bargaining representative of workers at the Richmond plant, but Ford officials refused sign.

⁹Charges by UAW Local 76 against Ford Motor Company, Case No. XX-C-71 dated 5 January and 22 January 1937, NARA RG-25, Entry 155, box 130, Ford Motor Company, Richmond, CA; E.S. Neal, Progress Report No. 1 in Case No. XX-C-71 dated 9 March 1937, NARA RG-25, Entry 155, box 130, Ford Motor Company, Richmond, CA; Thomas H. Kennedy, "Intermediate Report," unpublished National Labor Relations Board report dated 2 September 1938, HFM Acc. No. 51, box 8, Richmond, CA, folder, p. 1-6; National Labor Relations Board, "Decision and Order," 21 February 1941, HFM Acc. No. 51, box 8, Richmond, CA, p. 4-6; W.F. Williamson to I.A. Capizzi, letter dated 7 February 1941, HFM Acc. No. 51, box 8, Richmond, CA, Correspondence folder; "UAW Open Meet Swells Ranks of Local Union 76," *Contra Costa Labor Journal* (16 April 1937): 1.

¹⁰"Sit-Down Strike At Ford," *Richmond Independent* (23 April 1937): 1, 3; "Parley Ends Ford Strike," *Richmond Independent* (24 April 1937): 1, 3; "Ford Plant Work," *Richmond Independent* (26 April 1937): 1; "Ford Plant Schedule Is Resumed," *Richmond Independent* (27 April 1937): 1; "The Reminiscences of Mr. Clarence Bulwinkel," 34. There are some excellent photos of the strikers on p. 3 of the 24 April issue.

During this second strike, the International Association of Machinists also made a brief effort to organize workers at the Richmond branch. At a June 4th meeting between the Local 560 and Ford management, the union informed the company that of the total 1,316 production workers at the Richmond branch, 1,120 of them wanted Local 76 to represent them when bargaining such issues as wages and working conditions. Adams, claiming to represent the Ford Motor Company, agreed to certain of the union's demands concerning grievances and seniority, but he said that Ford would not agree to formally recognize the union. He called the other agreements he had made with the union a kind of back-door recognition. With those assurances, the union ended the strike.¹¹

Meanwhile, Ford continued its anti-union campaign. The company formed an organization called the American Auto Workers Union and urged its employees to join it rather

¹¹"Ford Recognizes Auto Union After Sit-Down Strike," *Contra Costa Labor Journal* (30 April 1937): 1; "Ford Plant to Stay Shut, Edict As Strike Is Called," *Richmond Independent* (26 May 1937): 1, 8; "Ford Strike Is Unbroken," *Richmond Independent* (27 May 1937): 1, 4; "Strike Action Disputed by Union Heads," *Richmond Independent* (27 May 1937): 1, 4; "Ford Strike Siege Is Seen," *Richmond Independent* (28 May 1937): 1, 6; "A.F.L. Organizes Ford Men," *Richmond Independent* (29 May 1937): 1, 3; "Union Groups Contest Right to Represent Ford Men," *Richmond Independent* (31 May 1937): 1, 2; "Ford Strike Spread to Other Plants Threatened," *Richmond Independent* (1 June 1937): 1, 2; "Slaby Files Charges in Ford Strike," *Richmond Independent* (1 June 1937): 1; "Food Asked for Ford Strikers," *Richmond Independent* (2 June 1937): 1; "Membership in Unions May Be Settled," *Richmond Independent* (2 June 1937): 1, 3; "Ford Strike End Forecast," *Richmond Independent* (3 June 1937): 1; "Ford Peace Parley Is Held," *Richmond Independent* (4 June 1937): 1, 6; "New Effort for Ford Peace," *Richmond Independent* (5 June 1937): 1; "Charges Fly in U.A.W., Ford Row," *Richmond Independent* (5 June 1937): 1; "Ford Plant Here Reopened," *Richmond Independent* (7 June 1937): 1, 3; Weekly Report on Case No. XX-C-71 for week ending 1 May 1937, NARA RG-25, Entry 155, box 130, Ford Motor Company, Richmond, CA; "Amended and Supplemental Charge," charge filed by the NLRB and UAW against Ford Motor Company dated 19 January 1938, HFM Acc. No. 51, box 8, Richmond, CA, Correspondence folder; Kennedy, "Intermediate Report," 5-8, 39-41; NLRB, "Decision and Order," 1, 7-8; W.F. Williamson to F.A. Thomson, letter dated 21 June 1938, HFM Acc. No. 51, box 8, Richmond, CA, Correspondence folder; Press "Release by committee of 12 employees of Ford Motor Company, Richmond, California, who are members of UAW," NARA RG-25, Entry 155, box 130, Case No. XX-C-170, Ford Motor Company, Richmond, CA; "Petition for Investigation and Certification of Representatives Pursuant to Section 9(c) of the National Labor Relations Act," petition dated 2 June 1937, NARA RG-25, Entry 155, box 130, Case No. XX-C-125, Ford Motor Company, Richmond, CA.

In his Ford Motor Company oral history, M.L. Wiesmyer considered Gillespie a very untrustworthy character. Wiesmyer was also critical of Bennett's unsavory business methods regarding unions and other business matters; see "The Reminiscences of Mr. M.L. Wiesmyer," 104-105, 121-123, 142-143. Wiesmyer's reminiscences from within the Ford management structure reinforce a conclusion that Bennett's use of Gillespie in negotiations with the Richmond workers was an underhanded tactic.

than the UAW. Officials distributed literature, including a booklet titled "Ford Almanac for July 1937," designed to discourage workers from joining the union. A Ford foreman parked his car outside a union meeting and observed workers arriving and leaving.¹²

It had been Ford's practice to close the Richmond plant each year in September to modify the assembly line for the coming year's model cars. The company suspended the employment of most workers but retained others to make the changes in the plant. Then, when the company was ready to resume production it would call old workers back. In 1937, when the Richmond plant closed for the season on September 3rd, there were about 1,260 employees, of whom the UAW 939 claimed as members. The 1937 closure lasted longer than usual, causing the Richmond City Council to adopt a resolution urging Ford to open the plant as soon as possible. At the end of the year, Ford shipped cars assembled elsewhere in Richmond's territory, apparently to forestall the re-opening of the Richmond branch. In early December, Adams met with laid-off employees who were still members of the union. He informed them that Ford would soon resume operations at Richmond and that all the previous employees would be rehired, but that they would have to disband their grievance committee, eliminate their shop stewards, and quit the union. He tried to assure them that Ford's Long Beach branch was doing well without shop stewards. The plant re-opened on December 9th, and the company rehired about 680 workers. The union noticed that many shop stewards, union officers, and members of committees had not been rehired. The UAW therefore filed a formal complaint with the National Labor Relations Board NLRB in May 1938, claiming that 150 former Ford employees at Richmond had not been rehired because they had joined the union or had helped in the union organizing.¹³

As it turned out, John Gillespie, the individual who had introduced himself as Adams, began appearing on Ford's behalf at other meetings in the Bay Area, such as a meeting with the NLRB in San Francisco and with officers of the union local in Oakland. At those meetings, however, he used other names, like J.H. Peterson, who was a Ford official in Detroit, and Moore. At the NLRB meeting in June 1937, for example, C.A. Bulwinkel (Richmond plant manager), R.S. Harrison (Richmond plant superintendent), and Pat Smith (Ford Motor Company personnel department, Detroit) accompanied Adams as he impersonated Peterson, and they did not reveal to the NLRB officials Adams' true identify. In December 1937, after Gillespie appeared as Adams at a meeting with the Richmond workers to urge them to abandon the union so that they could be rehired, he met in Oakland with UAW leaders, introducing himself as a man named Moore. Some Richmond workers happened to be at the Oakland meeting, and they recognized Moore as the man who had presented himself to them in Richmond as Adams, a representative of Ford. After the December 1937 meeting with the union, at which he had said Ford would rehire

¹²"Amended and Supplemental Charge," 19 January 1938; NLRB, "Decision and Order," 1, 7-8. The latter includes quotes from the Ford Motor Company's anti-union literature.

¹³Kennedy, "Intermediate Report," 7-9; NLRB, "Decision and Order," 2, 11, 25; W.F. Williamson to F.A. Thomson, letter dated 26 May 1938, HFM Acc. No. 51, box 8, Richmond, CA, Correspondence folder; "Demand Reopening of Richmond Plant," *Labor Herald* (1 December 1937): 1, 4.

all the employees, "Adams" was not seen again representing Ford in labor negotiations.¹⁴

In the midst of Ford's anti-union campaign and the autumn 1937 shutdown of the Richmond branch, the Richmond auto workers decided in early November by a vote of 113 to 42 to leave Local No. 76 and form their own local. This move was contrary to the advice of Local No. 76 president Frank Slaby and of Harry Bridges, well-known leader of the Longshoremen's union in San Francisco. On 18 November 1937, the UAW issued a charter to Local 560 in Richmond. The initial officers of the new local were: Robert Phillips, president; Harry Morrison, vice president; Mike O'Donnell, secretary-treasure; Palmer Myhre, Stanley Schofield, and William Floor, trustees. Meanwhile, the new Richmond local sent a delegate to Detroit to participate with representatives from Long Beach and other Ford branch operations as well as from Ford's Michigan plants in launching a nationwide effort to gain Henry Ford's recognition of the union. The focus of the drive would be on organizing Ford's Dearborn and Detroit operations, and the UAW chose 35 organizers to work with employees there.¹⁵

The law firm Williamson & Wallace of San Francisco represented Ford during the NLRB investigation of the Richmond workers' complaint. As soon as management at Richmond learned that the union had filed the complaint, W.F. Williamson met with NLRB regional director Alice M. Rosseter in an effort to learn the nature of the union's grievance. In addition to complaining that most of the strike committee and the union's shop stewards had not been rehired, Local 560 asserted that Adams had promised they would get their jobs back. But the union also voiced suspicion, because they had begun to realize that Adams, whose real identity was Gillespie, was operating under several identities. It had led the workers to doubt that Ford was negotiating with them in good faith. Not knowing how the firm should represent the company with regard to this issue, Williamson & Wallace initially took the stance at meetings with Rosseter that the various people Gillespie claimed to have been were actually present at meetings. The firm, though, was in a difficult position: should it assert to the NLRB that Ford had negotiated with the union, even though the person representing the company used a false identity? or should it assert to the NLRB that Ford had not negotiated with the union because "Adams" was not a legitimate representative of the company, even though other Ford officials

¹⁴Kennedy, "Intermediate Report," 6-7 NLRB, "Decision and Order," 26-29; Williamson to Thomson, letter dated 26 May 1938; Memo for Files, NLRB memorandum describing meeting with Ford Motor Company representatives dated 4 June 1937, copy of memo in two locations, HFM Acc. No. 51, box 8, Richmond, CA, Correspondence folder, and NARA RG-25, Entry 155, box 130, Case No. XX-C-170, Ford Motor Company, Richmond, CA. See also a summary of Gillespie's activities in the Bay Area in "Take Ford Co's Word with a Grain of Salt," *The Labor Herald* (14 March 1941): 4. For an alternate view of Gillespie, see "The Reminiscences of Clarence Bulwinkel," 36. Bulwinkel considered Gillespie to be a very capable and valuable labor negotiator.

¹⁵"Desert Leaders," *San Francisco Voice of the Federation* (11 November 1937): 3; "National Ford Drive Mapped," *Labor Herald* (17 November 1937): 6; NLRB, "Decision and Order," 1; "Local Unit of U.A.W. Formed," *Richmond Independent* (6 December 1937): 4.

had been present at those meetings?¹⁶

The firm also began investigating the current status of individuals who were named in the complaint, hoping to find that they had quit voluntarily or were working elsewhere. After a brief investigation, the firm assured Ford headquarters in Dearborn that the workers' complaints about not being reinstated were groundless and that the present condition among those employed at the Richmond branch was contentment. After a more thorough investigation, however, Williamson & Wallace found that several men with good work records and considerable seniority, some of whose employment at Ford went back to 1922, had not been rehired. It began to appear that the union had good grounds for its complaint. Yet, the firm recommended to the Richmond management that the company should try to avoid an NLRB-sanctioned election, because the workers would undoubtedly vote to have the UAW represent them. The question facing top management in Dearborn was whether to acknowledge that Ford, in the person of "John Adams," had recognized the union at 1937 meetings, or to deny that Ford had recognized the union. In the case of the latter, there almost certainly would be an NLRB-sanctioned election.¹⁷

Ford's response notwithstanding, the UAW and workers at the Richmond branch petitioned to have Ford officially recognize Local 560 as the workers' representative in June 1938. The union claimed that a majority of the workers at Richmond had designated Local 560 as their representative and that Ford was not recognizing the local. Meanwhile, Williamson & Wallace had changed its opinion concerning the advisability of an election. The firm had been interviewing foremen at the plant, and they now believed that anti-union sentiment was quite high among the current workers. The NLRB hearing began on 20 June 1938. The union presented witnesses who testified that during all the recent periods that the Richmond plant was operating, both before the September 1937 closer and after the December 1937 re-opening, a majority of the production workers were either union members or had applied for membership. They also testified that, regardless of Gillespie's actual status as a representative of the company, Richmond managers like Bulwinkel and Harrison had assented to agreements Gillespie had made with the union. For these reasons, the union asserted that it should be recognized as the workers' bargaining agent.¹⁸

The NLRB hearing in the Richmond matter began June 20th and ended after three weeks of testimony on July 9th. NLRB examiner Thomas Kennedy heard testimony from about half the individuals named in the complaint. Kennedy issued his preliminary report on September 2nd. The NLRB examiner determined from the hearings that the Ford Motor Company at

¹⁶W.F. Williamson to F.A. Thomson, letters dated 4, 11, 14, 17, and 20 May 1938, HFM Acc. No. 51, box 8, Richmond, CA, Correspondence.

¹⁷Williamson to Thomson, letters dated 14, 17, 20, and 26 May 1938.

¹⁸"Petition for Investigation and Certification of Representatives Pursuant to Section 9(c) of the National Labor Relations Act," petition dated 7 June 1938, HFM Acc. No. 51, box 8, Richmond, CA, Correspondence folder; Williamson to Thomson, letters dated 9, 11, and 23 June 1938, HFM Acc. No. 51, box 8, Richmond, CA, Correspondence folder.

Richmond had engaged in unfair labor practices. Although Kennedy dismissed a small number of the complaints, he found that the reason most of the men were not rehired was clearly their union activities. The examiner also made recommendations for men not interviewed during the hearing, determining that they, too, had more seniority than many of the men who had been rehired and that they would have been rehired had they not participated in union activities. At the conclusion of his report, Kennedy recommended that Ford reinstate the men who had been unfairly not rehired. Moreover, he recommended that Ford not discourage its employees from joining Local 560 and that Ford recognize Local 560 as its production workers' representative at the bargaining table. In October, Williamson & Wallace filed an exception to the report on Ford's behalf. The NLRB did not issue its final order in the case until February 1941, essentially upholding Kennedy's recommendations. As part of the ruling, the NLRB ordered that Ford rehire 143 men who had wrongfully not been rehired and that Ford compensate them with back pay. The NLRB, incidently, had ruled in the union's favor in the Long Beach case as well.¹⁹

At the national level, Ford management continued to refuse to recognize UAW locals at its Detroit, Dearborn, and branch plants, and labor continued to battle for recognition of its union. When organized labor learned that Ford had been awarded a contract for the experimental jeeps in late 1940, labor's voice on the National Defense Board, Sidney Hillman, protested to no avail that the government should not contract with Ford if the company refused to operate within the nation's labor laws. In early 1941, Ford submitted the low bid to make nearly 12,000 trucks for the War Department, but this time the government insisted on including a clause in the contract that Ford abide by the Wagner Act and the Wages and Hours Law. When Ford refused, the War Department awarded the contract to the next highest bidder. In Michigan's contentious climate of red-baiting by Ford managers and Ford attorney I.A. Capizzi, and with former UAW president Homer Martin having been recruited by Ford to organize a competing auto workers union affiliated with the AFL, called the Federal Labor Union, the UAW was nevertheless able to implement a successful strike, when 85,000 workers in Detroit and Dearborn walked off the job in April 1941. After ten days, the strike finally induced Ford to meet the union's demands. Among them was an NLRB-sanctioned election, held on May 21. Of some 80,000 workers from Ford's River Rouge, Highland Park, and Lincoln plants casting ballots, 51,868 voted for the UAW and 26,132 voted for the AFL affiliate. Only about 2,000 workers voted against union representation. In the wake of the election, Ford agreed to sign a

¹⁹"7 Times for Ford: 'Guilt As Charged'," *The Labor Herald* (28 February 1941): 1; Kennedy, "Intermediate Report," 9-38, 44-46, schedules A, B, C, & D; NLRB, "Decision and Order, 11-23, 34-35; Williamson to Thomson, letter dated 30 July 1938, Williamson to Bulwinkel, letter dated 30 July 1938, Williamson to I.A. Capizzi, letter dated 7 February 1941, Williamson to B.J. Craig, letter dated 11 August 1941, all in HFM Acc. No. 51, box 8, Richmond, CA, Correspondence folder. Pages 9-38 of the "Intermediate Report" summarize the information provided by individuals at their interviews. There are similar summaries of workers' stories in NLRB, "Decision and Order," 11-23. Schedule A lists the men not interviewed for whom the complaint was dismissed. Schedule B lists the men not interview for whom the complaint was upheld. Schedule C lists the men interviewed for whom the complaint was upheld. Schedule D lists the men interviewed for whom the complaint was dismissed.

contract stating that the UAW would represent Ford's 120,000 production workers, including the 1,300 men working at Richmond.²⁰

Things were not quiet in Richmond as members of Local 560 watched events unfold in Detroit. *The Labor Herald* reported that on the Friday in February after the NLRB issued its order, the Ford service department at the Richmond plant warned the paperboy, who sold newspapers at the plant gate, not to shout any headlines about the decision. By 1941, operations at the Richmond branch had greatly expanded, as described in previous sections, and most of the union members against whom Ford had discriminated in 1937 and 1938 were now reportedly back at work. Therefore, when the NLRB issued its final order, Ford petitioned for a rehearing, claiming that the rehiring of employees subsequent to the controversy but prior to the NLRB order showed that Ford had not discriminated against the union members. The NLRB dismissed the appeal. Meanwhile, Ford tried to offer the aggrieved workers at the Richmond plant a settlement independent of the NLRB order, offering to pay 31.5% of the back pay and leave the other issues to litigation. Ford did not authorize the Richmond branch managers to negotiate with the union how the workers' back pay would be calculated, however, nor were the managers authorized to negotiate any other matters with the union. Ford's refusal to meet with local union representatives led to brief continuation of the controversy, but Ford eventually complied with the order to the union's and the NLRB's satisfaction late in the summer.²¹

Although Ford reinstated workers following the NLRB's February order and posted notices around the Richmond plant assuring workers of their right to join unions, the company did not actually recognize the Richmond local of the UAW. In April, Ford foremen at Richmond urged their workers to join Local No. 22669 of the AFL entity, the Federal Labor Union. Then in May, while workers in Detroit and Dearborn were voting in the NLRB-sanctioned election, the AFL local in Richmond suggested that the Richmond workers vote to elect officers of Local 22669. Local 560 of the UAW cautioned Richmond workers that this was merely a ploy by the AFL to give Local 22669 some patina of official standing. Recognition of Local 560 finally came in June, when Ford signed contracts with the UAW nationally, but not before the union and

²⁰"Henry Ford Gets Two Million Bucks," *The Labor Herald* (3 January 1941): 1; "Ford Gets a Taste of Justice," *The Labor Herald* (7 February 1941): 1; "Ford Fascism Crumbles," *The Labor Herald* (18 April 1941): 1; "Ford Election Set," *The Labor Herald* (18 April 1941): 1; "Americanize Ford with Historic CIO Pact," *The Labor Herald* (18 April 1941): 1, 3; Sol Dollinger and Genora Johnson Dollinger, *Not Automatic: Women and the Left in the Forging of the Auto Workers' Union* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 63-70; Nevins and Hill, *Ford: Decline and Rebirth*, 156-167.

²¹"Ford's Weird Policies," *The Labor Herald* (28 February 1941): 4; "Ford Co. Renews Battle at Richmond Assembly Plant," *The Labor Herald* (11 April 1941): 1; Williamson to Capizzi, letters dated 7 February and 12 July 1941; Williamson to Craig, letter dated 11 August 1941; "Supplemental Decision and Order," NLRB order dated 25 April 1941, HFM Acc. No. 51, box 8, Richmond, CA, Correspondence folder; Lannon, *Fight or Be Slaves*, 89. A copy of a subsequent agreement between Ford and the UAW is included as an exhibit in "Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. I, 1 January to 30 September 1944," 41, exhibit 15.

its members had exerted considerable energy in getting Ford to negotiate. Although Local 560 had once boasted that a large percentage of the Richmond workers had joined the UAW, membership had dwindled to a small, active core after the initial organizing drive in 1937. Vince McKenna, president of Local 560, reported in June 1941 that, following the signing of the national contract between Ford and the UAW, there was a healthy rush to join the union by workers at the Richmond plant, both new members and former members who wished to re-establish their good standing with the local. Ford put the last of the aggrieved workers back on the payroll on July 21st.²²

C. Labor During WWII

The United States had the highest percentage of its population working in the production of ordnance of all the nation's involved in World War II, Allied or Axis. By the same token, other countries had higher percentages of their male populations serving in the military than did the U.S. While in the U.S. only 1 in 6 men served in the Armed Forces, 1 in 4.5 men in Germany and 1 in 5 men in Great Britain and Japan served in those countries' militaries. Even though the U.S. enlisted many of its citizens in armaments production during the war years, the government was nevertheless tolerant of labor strikes. Workers staged work stoppages in 3,000 separate instances across the country in 1942 and 1943. Although workers could strike in Britain as well, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union prevented such behavior.²³ The situation at the Richmond Tank Depot reflected overall national conditions in many ways, as this section describes.

Labor was at least as scarce for Ford's Richmond plant during the war as it was at other factories around the country trying to meet the military's needs for weapons, ammunition, and equipment. Whereas many plants had high turnover rates, however, the Richmond plant evidently had a relatively stable workforce. In December 1942, A.B. Jewett of the Richmond branch employment department reported to Dearborn that the plant was experiencing a turnover rate of only 4% per month. This did not include men who entered military service, because the company did not classify them as having quit. Jewett reported that, in contrast, the Kaiser shipyards in Richmond, where employment stood at 82,000. Kaiser had a turnover of more than 14% each month. Jewett believed that two factors helped the turnover rate at Ford's Richmond plant: 1) the six-day week, and 2) women workers, who quit at a much lower rate than men did.²⁴

²²"Ford Co. Renews Battle at Richmond Assembly Plant," *The Labor Herald* (11 April 1941): 1; "Ford Election Set," *The Labor Herald* (16 May 1941): 1; "Americanize Ford with Historic CIO Pact," *The Labor Herald* (27 June 1941): 1, 3.

²³Alan S. Milward, *War, Economy and Society: 1939-1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979): 216-244, as summarized in Alan Gropman, "Industrial Mobilization," in *The Big L: American Logistics in World War II*, Alan Gropman, ed. (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1997), 76-77.

²⁴A.B. Jewett to M.L. Wiesmyer, memorandum dated 15 December 1942, HFM Acc. No. 371, box 16, folder 4.

Ford's lack of turnover was short-lived, however. For example, there were about 1,500 workers on Ford's payroll at Richmond in 1944, with a peak number of 2,111 in August (see table in the section above on Ford's Production and Processing of Tanks). To maintain that level of employment, Ford had hired 2,109 people during the course of the year, most of whom had never worked for Ford before. During the same year, 2,071 people quit the Richmond plant, only 4.3% of whom left to enter the military. Leading up to the August peak in employment, the Richmond had hired at about 100 new people and sometimes as many as 150 each week. Many of those summer employees were minors who returned to school in the fall. Reportedly, another reason that many workers left work at the Richmond Tank Depot in 1944 was because of rumors following the D-Day invasion that the war was essentially over. Some workers left Richmond

altogether, returning to their homes elsewhere in the country.²⁵ The following table shows the various durations of workers tenure at the Richmond branch in 1944:

Duration of Employment of Terminating Employees²⁶

	July	December
30 days or less	49.2%	37.5%
60 days or less	13.4	8.6
90 days or less	9.7	3.8
120 days or less	8.2	3.8
150 days or less	5.2	5.8
180 days or less	5.9	10.6
200 days or more	8.2	29.8

At the beginning of 1944, the 284 women on the payroll comprised 19% of the workforce. At the end of the year, the 341 women constituted 22% of the payroll. The number of Negro workers also increased during 1944, beginning with 103 black employees (6.4% of the workforce) in March, when Ford began keeping the statistic, and ending the year with 160 blacks on the payroll (10.5%).²⁷ That number jumped to 327 Negro workers (18.2% of the Ford employees) by the end of January 1945.²⁸

Ford also recorded other demographic data about its employees at the Richmond plant during various times. At the end of 1943, the company found that 14 employees out of 1,310 claimed to have had no schooling whatsoever, 95% of them had completed the 5th grade, 80% had completed the 8th grade, and 30% had completed four years of high school. At the end of 1944, Ford surveyed the birthplace of its employees, finding that only 15% were natives of California. As with the employees of other California companies producing in support of the

²⁵Ford Motor Company, Richmond Branch, Labor Relations Department, "Labor Relations & Employment Records Survey, January-December 1944," unpublished report in HFM Acc. No. 371, box 17, folder 4, pp. 1-3. Maj. Ball's report at the end of 1944, "Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. I, 1 January to 30 September 1944," 13, states that Ford's turnover was only 6% per month, which is a slightly lower figure than the approximately 8% turnover Ford's Survey showed.

²⁶"Labor Relations & Employment Records Survey, January-December 1944," 3.

²⁷"Labor Relations & Employment Records Survey, January-December 1944," 1, 4. The statistics on women workers are reiterated in Fern Hurley, "Women Man the Battle Stations," unpublished, undated (ca. March 1945) report in NARA RG-156, Entry 646, box A578, San Francisco Ordnance District History, Vol. XII, p. 37. Maj. Ball, "Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. I, 1 January to 30 September 1944," 13, reported that 9.5% of Ford's production workers were black and 24% were women at the end of 1944.

²⁸"Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. III, 1 January to 31 March 1945," 18.

war effort, many of Ford's employees at Richmond (31%) hailed from Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, and Missouri. A total of 40 states were represented on Ford's payroll, along with Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Philippine Islands. People from China, India, Australia, and fifteen European countries worked at Ford, and among the Latin American countries natives of Mexico, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Argentina, Brazil, and Peru were represented on the payroll.²⁹

One of the Richmond Tank Depot's labor problems was absenteeism. Maj. Ball reported in late 1944 that it averaged about 10%. It was especially high during the Christmas season, especially among women. One of the methods Ordnance used to try to inspire Ford workers to reduce absenteeism was to have battlefront veterans describe their experiences. One such event took place on 23 January 1945, the day George McFadden received the second of his cash awards for his idea for saving costs in transporting jeeps made at Richmond (see section above on jeeps). Ordnance presented him the award during a program to which all depot employees and their families were invited. During the program, seven veterans of the European theatre (one officer and six enlisted men) gave accounts of their experiences in battle. Introduced as "personal emissaries of Gen. Eisenhower," they recounted the terrible hardships of war and appealed to the workers to continue Richmond's excellent record of production to help speed the end of the war. Capt. Spiker reported that the program had no noticeable effect on absenteeism. The day of the program, 8.2% of the workers were absent; the following day, 7.2% were absent. That compared with an absenteeism rate of 7.2% and 6.8% for the same two days (Tuesday and Wednesday) the previous week. Workers were especially likely to skip work on Sundays, with 18.9% and 23.5% missing on 14 and 21 January, respectively. Therefore, the Richmond Tank Depot decided to discontinue Sunday work on 28 January.³⁰

A related problem concerned overtime. In October 1944, all workers at the Richmond Tank Depot, both Ordnance and Ford employees, went from three eight-hour shifts per day to two, with the day shift operating from 6:30 am to 3:00 pm and the swing shift from 3:30 pm to midnight. In January 1945, as shipping orders increased, production workers went on an overtime schedule, working ten-hour shifts, with the day shift running from 6:30 am to 5:00 pm and the night shift from 5:30 pm to 4:00 am. Workers on the night shift did not like that new schedule, so on January 9th, 221 of 367 production workers walked off the job at midnight. The next day, management and union leaders met with the shift. Jewett appealed to the workers' patriotism. Bill Williams, one of the union leaders, reminded the workers that there was a grievance procedure in the union contract for such complaints, and he asked them to follow that procedure, rather than walking off the job. The appeals worked, and night-shift production workers abided by the overtime schedule. By March, however, a new problem arose affecting both shifts: workers who didn't want the overtime hours left work after eight hours. By mid-March, as many as 196 men were leaving work early. Capt. Spiker appealed the workers, asking them to be conscientious about the need to maintain production to supply soldiers fighting

²⁹"Labor Relations & Employment Records Survey, January-December 1944," 5.

³⁰"Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. II, part 1, 1 October to 31 December 1944," 13, 114; "Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. III, 1 January to 31 March 1945," 10-11, 16.

overseas. The numbers of workers leaving early thereafter decline markedly, but the problem persisted.³¹

In February, the Army and Navy mounted a publicity campaign called "Man the Battle Stations" and aimed at recruiting workers necessary to maintain industrial production through the end of the war. Radio station KSFO broadcast a special program, sponsored by Lucky Lager Beer, growing out of the military's campaign. The program emphasized the work being done at the Richmond Tank Depot. Capt. Spiker, commanding officer of the Richmond Tank Depot, took part in a ten-minute interview on station KRE, again stressing the importance of the work being done at Richmond and saying the depot had an immediate need for 100 workers with training in automobile manufacture.³²

During the course of the war, Ford maintained a permanent training program at the Richmond branch to ensure that workers and supervisors had the necessary skills. For example, during 1944 and 1945, Ford hired a total of 4,958 new employees, both men and women, of whom 432 (9%) received on-the-job-training in the skills necessary to become electricians, carpenters, draftsmen, engine mechanics, machinists, millwrights, painters, plumbers, radio technicians, steam fitters, tinsmiths, and welders.³³

Ford was not willing to fill all of its openings, however, by training individuals without the requisite skills. This was demonstrated in February 1945, when Bay Area newspapers picked up on the above-described "Man the Battle Stations" publicity campaign and published articles suggesting that the Richmond Tank Depot was willing to hire untrained women. Women applicants who flooded Ford's employment office were turned away, leading Ford employment manager A.B. Jewett, UAW-CIO representative Frank Slaby, and two representatives of Local 560 to call a meeting with Capt. Spiker to register their complaints concerning the publicity. Both Jewett and the union representatives told Spiker that they needed male applicants, not female. The reason, however, was not simple prejudice but rather the limits California law placed on the kinds of work employers could ask women to do, such as lift heavy weights. Spiker responded that the newspapers had run the articles without his knowledge, and he promised ask the San Francisco Ordnance District to try to get newspapers to check their facts before publishing such articles.³⁴

³¹"Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. II, part 1, 1 October to 31 December 1944," 56; "Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. III, 1 January to 31 March 1945," 18-19, 197-198.

³²"Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. III, 1 January to 31 March 1945," 67-68; a report and a script documenting the broadcasts are included as exhibits SS and TT on pp. 116-128.

³³"Richmond Branch Operations under Contract W-883-ORD-2676," 3-4.

³⁴"Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. III, 1 January to 31 March 1945," 89-91; "Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. IV, 1 April to 30 June 1945," 188.

Nevertheless, the Richmond Tank Depot continued to have difficulty finding enough workers during the closing months of the war in 1945, as many who had migrated to California for work in wartime industries headed home to other parts of the country. Because of the labor shortage, Ford hired ever greater percentages of blacks and women. Observing the overall trend in July 1945, Capt. Spiker wrote:

Before the war, women and negro employees were no problem at the Ford Motor Company for the reason that they were practically non-existent on the employment records. While they present no problems of a serious nature, it is expected that they will be released when the Contract terminates.³⁵

The percentage of women working at the Richmond Tank Depot peaked in October 1944, and the percentage of blacks peaked in February 1945.³⁶

During the ensuing months, demands on production at the Richmond plant declined as did employment levels, but Ford still experienced a labor shortage until June, when schools let out and the company was able to hire boys aged 16 to 18 for the summer. Despite a slight increase in the number of Ford employees at the plant during the summer, workers processing combat vehicles nevertheless had to work considerable overtime because of the orders for production the Army made during the final push toward victory against Japan. In mid-July 1945, the depot went on 12-hour shifts for five days and worked 10-hour shifts an additional eight days. The governor of California even authorized the depot to have women work 10-hour days and 60-hour weeks because of the emergency. Despite the grueling schedule, absenteeism during the week of 12-hour shifts was the lowest of the month. Immediately after the announcement of Japan's unconditional surrender, demand for production declined, as the only Ordnance work remaining was to prepare vehicles being stored at Richmond for shipment to storage facilities elsewhere. When Richmond got the news of the Japanese surrender, Ford had 1,138 production workers processing combat vehicles; by the end of the month, the number was down to 899. Ford dismissed all of the high-school boys to assure work for men supporting families, the company transferred some of the production workers to work on reconverting the plant to civilian production, and more than 170 production workers quit, either to resume peacetime jobs or to move back to their homes in other parts of the country. Because of CIO seniority rules, the percentages of blacks and women working on the Ordnance contract remained relatively high through the end of October.³⁷

³⁵"Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. IV, 1 April to 30 June 1945," 187.

³⁶"Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. IV, 1 April to 30 June 1945," 187-188.

³⁷"Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. IV, 1 April to 30 June 1945," 187-190; "Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. V, 1 July to 30 September 1945," 23-25, 95, 157-158.

There was a general decline in the percentage of women working in the automobile industry after the war; see Ruth Milkman, "Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Management's Postwar Purge of Women Automobile Workers," in *On the Line: Essays in the History of Auto Work*, Nelson Lichtenstein and Stephen Meyer, eds. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press,

Some of the workers at the Richmond Tank Depot toward the end of the war were men who had received medical discharges from the armed forces after being wounded in battle.³⁸

1. Unions

In November 1943, two employees at Richmond and an organizer of the United Office and Professional Workers of America tried to organize clerical workers at the Richmond branch. They distributed literature to workers outside the Richmond plant, and they scheduled a meeting between clerical workers and the union at the UAW's Local 560 hall at El Cerrito. The organizing effort continued through 1944. In April 1944, the United Office Workers and the CIO filed a complaint with the NLRB on behalf of an office worker whom Ford had discharged.

In August, the Army recommended the Richmond Tank Depot for its third Army-Navy "E" Award, which would be the second star on the depot's flag. Because a complaint was on file at the NLRB, however, the Army delayed notifying the depot of the award. When Local 560 of the UAW heard of the delay, E.D. Fry, secretary-treasurer of the local, wrote Maj. Ball a letter stating that Local 560 was not associated with the complaint and that the complaint had nothing to do with production workers in the plant. He said delaying the award was unfair to the plant workers who had achieved the record meriting the award, and he therefore asked Maj. Ball to lift the objection that was delaying the process.³⁹

Another incident that aroused the anti-union concern of Ford management occurred in the spring of 1945, when the plant foremen formed a social group they called the Ford Foremen's Club. They held their first meeting at the Richmond Golf Club, and they instituted a rule that anyone talking about problems at work would be fined a dollar. At the same time, organizers on the West Coast representing the Foremen's Association of America (FAA) were trying to organize a union for foremen at industrial plants. The FAA had been successful in organizing foremen at some automotive plants in Michigan, including Ford's River Rouge plant. To counter the union movement, a group called the California Personnel Managers' Association formed a subsidiary organization called the California Industrial Management Association (CIMA) so that groups like the Ford Foremen's Club could affiliate. The idea was that foremen had a desire to belong to an organization, and by affiliating with the CIMA they would be less susceptible to the possible attractions of belong to a union for foremen. Richmond superintendent W.A. Abbott approved of the steps the foremen had taken and was quick to assure the Ford hierarchy in

1989), 129-152. The details of women's experiences at the Richmond Tank Depot have not been examined for this study.

³⁸"Richmond Tank Depot," Vol. II, part 2, December 1944, photos.

³⁹Robert Collins to I.A. Capizzi, letter dated 29 June 1944, HFM Acc. No. 51, box 8, Richmond, CA, Correspondence folder; "Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. I, 1 January to 30 September 1944," 13-14, 22-24; "Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. II, part 1, 1 October to 31 December 1944," 13. The latter report (p. 37, exhibit no. 11) includes a copy of the literature the UOPWA-CIO distributed, in the form of a true-false test, to workers during the organizing drive.

Dearborn that the Richmond foremen remained opposed to unions. M.L. Wiesmyer wrote back to Abbott, saying the news made him nervous: "We don't think much of the idea of foremen forming any kind of organization whatever." After the initial meeting of the Ford Foremen's Club, however, interest in belonging to an organization began to fade. The group voted not to affiliate with the CIMA, and Ford's labor relations supervisor at Richmond predicted that the club would soon dissolve.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, production workers at the Richmond branch continued to be represented by the UAW, which maintained a closed shop. Once hired, every production worker, whether man or woman, paid the UAW a five-dollar initiation fee. Monthly dues were \$1.50. Workers' complaints were handled under the four-step grievance process established between the UAW and Ford. In 1943, workers filed 69 grievances against the company, and in 1944 they filed 187. Half of the grievances were settled at the first stage in the process in 1943 and two-thirds were settled at the first stage in 1944. Only eight grievances went beyond the second stage in 1943, and eleven went beyond that stage in 1944. One grievance had to be settled by the Umpire (the fourth stage in the process) in 1944. M.A. Williams headed the UAW bargaining unit at the Richmond plant.⁴¹

An important feature of the labor situation at the Richmond Tank Depot during the war years is that instead of two classes of workers, labor and management, there were four: Ford employees who were members of the UAW, Ford officials, military officers of the Ordnance Department and the Signal Corps, and civil service employees of those two branches of the Army. Numerous reports by the commanding officer at the depot describe the generally cooperative atmosphere that existed among the various groups, but one report suggests that comity was not ubiquitous. In his third quarter 1944 report, Maj. Ball wrote:

At the beginning of 1944 a study was made of the Ordnance plant organization. Two decisions were reached: first, Ordnance personnel would not be increased; and second, relationship with the Contractor would have to be improved in order to meet requirements of both quality and increasing quantities of vehicles for overseas shipment.

Everyone in the Ordnance organization was instructed to refrain from any discussion with the Contractor's personnel involving controversial subjects; all such cases were to be reported to the Commanding Officer.⁴²

⁴⁰Abbott to Wiesmyer, memorandum dated 3 April 1945, Wiesmyer to Abbott, memorandum dated 9 April 1945, Jewett to Stewart Evans, letter dated 13 April 1945, HFM Acc. No. 371, box 17, folder 4; Nelson Lichtenstein, "'The Man in the Middle': A Social History of Automobile Industry Foremen," in *On the Line: Essays in the History of Auto Work*, Nelson Lichtenstein and Stephen Meyer, eds. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 169-177.

⁴¹"Labor Relations & Employment Records Survey, January-December 1944," 5-6; Hurley, "Women Man the Battle Stations," 35, 38.

⁴²"Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. I, 1 January to 30 September 1944," 3.

The report gave no hint of what such "controversial subjects" might be. The following quarter, Ball wrote that attitude and cooperation between Ordnance and Ford were excellent.⁴³ He did, however, describe details of a subject that could possibly cause friction in a workplace:

The general attitude of the Ordnance personnel is excellent. All the personnel take pride in working for the Government and feel that they are a bit closer to the war effort. These factors offset the lower differential in pay between that of Ordnance and the Contractor. However, considering annual leave, sick leave and other privileges, the conditions are fairly equal. There exists a very desirable attitude between the Contractor's personnel and Ordnance personnel insofar as there is close cooperation, geniality, thorough understanding of each one's job and in general reflects mutual respect.⁴⁴

2. Women

The increase in the percentage of workers at the Richmond plant who were women, noted above, mirrored a national trend brought about by the mobilization of the population for the war effort. In July 1944, women comprised 36.9% of workers in factories working under prime contracts with the government. The segment of America's total work force that was female rose from 25.8% before war to a high of 35.4% during the war. Although this new demographic of America's industrial workforce signaled a remarkable social change for the nation, it was by no means extreme in comparison with other belligerents in the war. In Britain's civilian labor force, 38% of workers were women at the height of the war. In the Soviet Union, women were 38% of the work force in 1940 and 53% in 1942. German women already comprised 37% of the civilian work force before Hitler invaded Poland in 1939; by 1944, 51% of German civilian workers were women.⁴⁵

The mobilization of workers in America's industrial plants was not as easy as simply hiring women to do jobs men had once done. Many women, especially single women and poor

⁴³"Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. II, part 1, 1 October to 31 December 1944," 3.

⁴⁴"Richmond Tank Depot, Vol. II, part 1, 1 October to 31 December 1944," 6.

⁴⁵Donald M. Nelson, *Arsenal of Democracy, the Story of American War Production* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946), 237; Francis Walton, *Miracle of World War II: How American Industry Made Victory Possible* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 372, 382-383; Milward, *War, Economy and Society: 1939-1945*, 216-244; Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda 1939-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 185; Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 29; Harold G. Vatter, *U.S. Economy in World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 20; all summarized in Gropman, "Industrial Mobilization," 78-80.

women, already were self-employed or had low-paying jobs in domestic service or the textile, clothing, and shoe industries before the war. Some were quick to accept higher pay in military production but circumstances for others precluded them from taking the new employment opportunities. Women from rural areas were generally not available, because their work-loads there had already increased in making up for the men who had left farms and small-town businesses for military service. Cities with ordnance manufacturing plants could not stand to import large numbers of women from other areas, even if available, because housing and transportation were already stretched to the limit with the influx of male industrial workers and their families. Federal manpower planners were loath to recruit married women with children, because then the government would need to develop child-care resources, a burden they hoped to avoid. They focused their attention on a demographic they labeled the "idle" reserve, who were recent high school graduates or unemployed, married women without children and already living in crowded industrial manufacturing centers. In some parts of the country, including at the Richmond Tank Depot, women who worked in ordnance plants were dubbed "WOWs," for Women Ordnance Workers.⁴⁶

England had already established a national system by which women were required to register for assignment to work either in manufacturing, the military, or the civilian defense. Eleanor Roosevelt had advocated such a system for mobilizing American women since 1941. Paul V. McNutt, chief of the War Manpower Commission, had initially believed there would be enough men workers available, but by autumn 1942 he, too, wanted a National Service Act that would authorize him to register men and women alike and then direct them to workplaces where they were needed.⁴⁷

Then there were the difficulties of putting women to work within the existing legal framework intended to protect women. A 1939 California law prohibited employers from making women work more than 8 hours per day or more than 48 hours per week. In February 1943, the California legislature passed the War Production Act, which authorized the Governor to issue a permit to an employer that would allow that employer to have women work more

⁴⁶"The Margin Now Is Womanpower," *Fortune* 27 (February 1943): 99-103, 222-224; Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time: Franklin & Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 364. The article in *Fortune* has some stunning photos of women working in factories. It also has some interesting material on attitudes toward women workers. For example, there are some interesting stories about women wanting to wear stylish hair to work and refusing to take necessary safety precautions regarding their hair. There is also a description of the acronym, WOW, for Women Ordnance Workers that was promoted by Bridgeport Brass in Connecticut. It mirrored the names given women in the military (WAVES, WAACs, WAFs). WOWs there even had a uniform of red bandannas and "handsome" blue coveralls (p. 223). Women workers at the Richmond Tank Depot were identified as WOWs in "Richmond Tank Depot, Richmond, Calif., 1 October - 31 December 1944," Vol. II, part 2, the section of photographs.

⁴⁷"The Margin Now Is Womanpower," 100; Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time*, 364-365.

hours than normally allowed under the law, if the work would further production in support of the war effort and if the work would not increase the risk of harming the health and safety of the women workers.⁴⁸ On the other hand some of the difficulties in hiring women appeared to be imaginary. The War Manpower Commission had a program for training industrial workers for the war effort, and it routinely received requests for literature aimed specifically at training women. One of the program's managers responded:

We have so many requests from nervous employers for special material on the training of women that I've asked my secretary to go out and buy a rubber stamp to use on every printed piece we send out, reading "this includes women, Negroes, handicapped, Chimamen, and Spaniards." The only difference between training men and women in industry is in the toilet facilities.⁴⁹

Such evidently was the attitude of the Ford management at the Richmond branch, which was said to have been a "house of men." Prior to the war, only three women had worked at the Richmond branch, a daytime telephone operator and two typists. The shortage of workers, however, compelled the Richmond branch to hire women, and the managers quickly learned that women could make excellent industrial workers. For some tasks (work involving small details or tedium, said to require greater patience) they even concluded that women were superior to men. But women workers at Ford did not fall into their posts merely because of the manpower shortage. They also had a strong advocate at the San Francisco Ordnance District in the person of Rowenah M. Peters, Executive Assistant to the District Chief. She had begun working for the Office of the Chief of Ordnance in Washington, DC, in 1931. Peters transferred to the San Francisco District in 1933, and by the time World War II started she had the most seniority of the district's civilian staff. She had gained a respected reputation among industrialists and military staff alike for her understanding of ordnance production and for her expertise in personnel matters, and she was said to have paid official visits to more Army ordnance facilities than any other woman in the U.S. She therefore took a lead role in convincing industrialists in the jurisdiction of the San Francisco District that women should be among the new recruits as companies mobilized to meet wartime demand.⁵⁰

Her first such visit in autumn 1940 was to the Norris Stamping and Manufacturing Company, which had just received its second Ordnance contract under the pre-war mobilization programs. The company's president, K.T. Norris, also believed that women could make effective industrial workers, and he enthusiastically worked with Peters to move women into his production schemes. The Norris company is reported to have had one of the best records during the war of employing women toward a combination of effective production and of goodwill between workers and management. Other companies were not so receptive to the idea of

⁴⁸D.C. Moffitt to M.L. Wiesmyer, memorandum dated 22 February 1943, and Wiesmyer to Abbott and Jewett, memorandum dated 1 March 1943, HFM Acc. No. 371, box 16, folder 4.

⁴⁹Channing Dooley, quoted in "The Margin Now Is Womanpower," 102.

⁵⁰Hurley, "Women Man the Battle Stations," 2-4, 36.

employing women. The manager at Ford's Richmond plant was said to have been disdainful of the suggestion, and the manager at the Yuba Manufacturing Company in Benicia is said to have responded to Peters that he would not even consider the idea of hiring women. The Yuba company made gold dredges during peacetime, and the manager dismissed the notion that women could help turn the plant's lathes, drill-presses, and overhead cranes to the work of producing ordnance. Three years later, however, virtually all the ordnance producers in the San Francisco District were employing women, who had gained reputations, among other things, as skilled machine-tool and crane operators.⁵¹

Women worked in all the sections at the Richmond branch during World War II. Of 332 women working there at the end of February 1945, 95 worked on the jeep assembly line. Curiously, two other main jeep assembly plants at Dallas and Louisville did not employ women. It was because of this distinction that jeep chassis assembly foreman Fred Willmer was said to have been especially proud that his plant routinely produced jeeps at the least cost of the three Ford plants. Tasks involved in jeep production that were filled by women included assembling and installing light switches, driving jeeps off the assembly line and taking each for a test drive, delivering jeeps to the Army's Ordnance Inspectors, and draining gasoline from the tank in preparation for shipment. One of the dirtiest jobs in the plant involved dipping 25-pound sacks of parts (the heaviest load women were allowed to lift under California law) in a thick, black anti-rust fluid prior to sorting them into boxes for use by workers along the jeep assembly line. A woman named Bette Hargrave held that job in 1945. Georgette Bittich was one of the women who gave jeeps their five-mile test drive before delivering them to the Ordnance Inspectors. The bodies of the twenty or so jeeps she tested daily were said to be still so hot from the paint-curing oven that she had to sit on a pillow to shield her from the radiant heat, which abated after about a mile on the road.⁵²

In the Tank Depot, women worked at numerous jobs, including wrapping machine gun parts for shipping. The parts were already coated with grease. A woman would grab the necessary parts and wrap them in grease-proof paper. After labeling the package, she would dip it in hot wax. When the wax cooled, she would wrap the package again in paper and label it, this time sealing the label with cellophane tape. Other women wrapped radio parts for the tanks. Some of the tank radios were manufactured to different specifications than those finally selected for particular tanks. This meant personnel at the Ford plant, often women, had to disassemble the radios and re-wire them according to the new requirements. Reportedly, women were usually selected for the radio work because it was highly repetitive but they could maintain the attentiveness necessary to achieve quality work. Other women would wrap radio parts in paper and wax, similar to the way other women wrapped gun parts, and then they placed the wrapped radio parts in wooden boxes. As a final sealant, they would paint tar along the edges of the boxes. Often women would remark that they took great care with their jobs because a vehicle they outfitted or a part they wrapped might be used by a loved one, a son, grandson, or nephew,

⁵¹Hurley, "Women Man the Battle Stations," 2-5.

⁵²Hurley, "Women Man the Battle Stations," 43-47, 58-61.

fighting in either the European or the Pacific theatre.⁵³

As mentioned in an earlier section, the Carpentry Shop behind the Richmond plant made all the wooden crates for shipping vehicles and parts overseas. Skilled carpentry was another task that men at Ford had once thought women could not master, but in 1945 the foreman of the Carpentry Shop considered his women workers to be highly skilled and faster than the men who used to work there. He had a couple of women on his crew who were grandmothers.⁵⁴

Isla Buster worked in a department that packed lights and related equipment. She and her husband had moved to Richmond from Lubbock, Texas, when their son, Bob, enlisted in the Army Air Force to serve as a gunnery sergeant. She said, "Our pledge to Bob when he joined was that we would work in defense 'till he comes home, and we're going to keep it."⁵⁵

Another job in preparing vehicles for shipment was called "blue freeze." It derived its name from the tape, originally blue, that workers used to seal all openings on tanks and other larger vehicles that were not crated in wooden boxes. The work was conducted outdoors on the pier adjacent to the Ford plant, and many of the workers were women.⁵⁶

Women also worked for Ford in the Service Stock Department. Dealerships and repair shops throughout Richmond's expanded service region sent orders to the Richmond branch for parts, and workers in the Service Stock Department filled the orders. Several women were pickers and packers, meaning they picked the ordered parts of the shelves and packed them for shipment. Eva Rost was a picker who started work at Ford in July 1943. Her husband was a SeaBee in the Pacific theatre, and her two step-sons were also in the military. In early 1945 she said, "I'd rather work while they are gone, but when my husband comes home, any soldier that wants it can have this job."⁵⁷

Some of the women working at the Richmond Tank Depot were not Ford employees but rather worked for the Army, either the Ordnance Department or the Signal Corps. The latter worked under the command of the Ordnance Department but had sole responsibility for inspecting radios and other communications equipment on the vehicles processed at the Richmond Tank Depot. The Signal Corp detachment at Richmond had one military officer, a lieutenant, and a civilian in charge. They were both men, as were the civilian technicians who worked for the Signal Corps. All of the Signal Corps inspectors were women. Women also worked as Ordnance Department inspectors. When the U.S. had entered the war, Ordnance inspectors had been men, and they were initially eligible for deferments from the draft. By

⁵³Hurley, "Women Man the Battle Stations," 48-57.

⁵⁴Hurley, "Women Man the Battle Stations," 69-71.

⁵⁵Hurley, "Women Man the Battle Stations," 64.

⁵⁶Hurley, "Women Man the Battle Stations," 64-69.

⁵⁷Hurley, "Women Man the Battle Stations," 62-63.

summer 1942, however, it was nearly impossible for men to continue to receive draft deferments solely for being trained Ordnance inspectors. In July 1942, the Ordnance Department began to explicitly recruit and train women to serve as inspectors, training them along with eligible men. Training of Ordnance inspectors had long been conducted at Arsenals, but to meet the new demand the Ordnance Department established special training programs at other institutions. For example, the Los Angeles region of the San Francisco Ordnance District established a special training school at the University of Southern California, which enrolled its first class in February 1942. By the time the third class enrolled in July 1942, two-thirds of the trainees were women.⁵⁸ After some experience with women inspectors, Ordnance concluded they often made superior workers:

It was found that women inspectors were inclined to be more careful on details, did not become dissatisfied with monotonous work and were not continually asking for advancement. They were used more and more in inspection work, even being placed on such work as tank assembly to inspect welding procedure.⁵⁹

The Richmond plant had several employees whose specific jobs arose when Ford began hiring women. Angela Zatta, a native of Italy, was custodian of the women's rest rooms. Stella DeJarnett and her husband, a wounded veteran of World War I, moved to Richmond from Fresno at the beginning of WWII to work in war production. Her job at Ford's Richmond branch was Matron of Women, a sort of in-plant police officer for women, who could observe activities of workers throughout the facility, including women's rest rooms. When the Richmond branch began employing women, it established a separate first aid station for them. Molly Mansfield was the registered nurse who staffed it. Edna Guyn served as the women's counselor at the Richmond branch. She had an office, but conducted most of her counselling as she walk about the plant. Women could raise any issue with her, whether about family matters at home or troublesome situations at work. She was able to help resolve some issues informally that otherwise might have led to formal grievances.⁶⁰

Much of the above information on women workers at the Richmond Tank Depot derives from a report called "Women Man the Battle Stations" and prepared by Fern Hurley for inclusion in history of the San Francisco Ordnance District. Hurley visited the Richmond plant on 28 February and 1 March 1945, interviewing foremen and women production workers. Following is a list of women reported by Hurley to have been working at the Richmond branch at the time of her visit in 1945:

⁵⁸Hurley, "Women Man the Battle Stations," 54; "Richmond Tank Depot, 1 January - 30 September 1944," unpublished historical report in NARA RG-156, Entry 646, box A599, San Francisco Ordnance District, Vol XXIII, Part 1, p. 33, photograph of Signal Corps personnel; "San Francisco Ordnance District History, 1939-1942," unpublished historical report in NARA RG-156, Entry 646, box A576, San Francisco Ordnance District, Vol I, Part 4, pp. 38-42.

⁵⁹"San Francisco Ordnance District History, 1939-1942," 42.

⁶⁰Hurley, "Women Man the Battle Stations," 39-43.

Theodora Acredolo	Edna Guyn	Carrie E. McDonald
Sue Allen	Bette Hargrave	Dolores McDowell
Mary (Zatta) Baldwin	Agnes Harrington	Fay Moore
Aline Beaird	Bessie Harris	Lottie Mott
Georgette Bittich	Edith Heller	Valborg (Olsen) Ney
Blanche Bottini	Flonnie Helm	Arline Noyes
Ivadel Brown	Lucille Helzer	Emma Nuti
Mary Bruce	Addie Henderson	Bertha Parker
Isla Buster	Virginia Hinman	Elberta Peters
Betty Carder	Jean Jackson	Marie Phelan
Fannie Caswell	Irene Jones	Doris Phillips
Patricia Clifton	Mary Jones	Anita Pike
Jennie Darling	Pearl Kallenberger	Kathryn Ray
Stella DeJarnett	Jessie Loera	Eva L. Rost
Margaret Dennis	Inez Lonnon	Edith Sadie
Ruth Fisher	Bertha Looney	Eunice Smith
Trini Garcia	Bertha King	Ann Stiefel
Louise Gaylord	Molly Mansfield	Helen Taylor
Ada M. Gerken	Bessie Martin	Nadine West
Marie Grubes	Ann McDonald	Angela Zatta

Hurley described the work some of the women were doing, but she devoted as much attention in her report to other aspects of the women's lives, especially in three areas: 1) their background and what brought them to work at Ford, 2) family members serving in the armed forces, and 3) how other members of the family, especially children, help the women take care of the work necessary to maintain a home.