

Strikes in the early 1930's



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Strikes were common place in the early 1930" s in all industrial and manufacturing corporations. They were used to win power away from the corporate giants, and put it in the hands of the working class. Labor used strikes for a variety of reasons, some for higher wages, some for working conditions, some for safety on the job, and still others for recognition. In a book entitled, " I Remember Like Today: The Auto-Lite Strike of 1934" Philip A. Korth and Margaret R. Beegle compile an oral history account of this fight for the rights of the working class.

To gain the knowledge acquired for this book, the authors searched high and low to ind the living survivors of this turning point for organized labor in Toledo. After discovering the individuals who could help, the investigators interviewed and then recorded the men and women" s accounts of the strike. Then they transcribed the interviews verbatim. This method provides for a more personal approach to learning what had happened in the strike. It allows the reader to see what actually happen through the The book is a collection statements, stories, and feelings of the men and women involved in the strike.

Each individual tells their story based on headings, and that is what complied the chapters. In this method, the reader gets to hear all sides of the story because Korth and Beegle get some who were union supports, union organizers, some who were strike breakers, management. Certainly no critic can say, this book only tells one All of the forth-coming events, activities, and problems took place in Toledo, Ohio at the Electric Auto-Lite Company. The Electric Auto-Lite Company was a part of the automotive assembly industry.

It used mainly unskilled workers to operate the machinery, and the machinery was that There were two separate strikes at Auto-Lite. The first was used to force the company into recognizing the union; that was the first step towards collective bargaining... recognition. It started on February 23, lasted only four days, and resulted in the reinstatement of the 15 workers who walked out, and an agreement. The workers won the battle but that was a long way from winning the war.

Auto-Lite gave the union a 30-day contract, which basically stated the company would recognize the union for thirty days, but even in that thirty days the company refused to recognize the union as a bargaining representative of the workers. When this thirty days reached its conclusion, the union was no better off than when it started. In fact in those thirty days the company was preparing itself for a strike. They started mass hiring new workers, so they could keep running the company if the labor walked out.

The second strike began on April 13, and consisted of some 400 Auto-Lite workers. The strike seemingly divided the work force equally, as many went in as picketed. Then on May 3, a court injunction restricted the number of picketers at one time to a minuscule twenty-five. This rallied the surrounding men and women in the area to unite and break this injunction that limited all of their freedom. On May 21, 22, and 23 more than 6,000 men and women united in front of Auto-Lite to hear speakers and to protest the company, along with protesting the court injunction.

This is when the real trouble started for the company and the picketers. On May 23, A young woman by the name of Alma Hand was stuck by a steel

bracket which caused a riot among the crowd, and which initiated a raid on the building. The deputies fired tear gas at the would be invaders to stop them from storming the facility. That night a raging crowd refused to allow the scabs off the premises. After this episode, the Ohio National Guard was called in to restore the peace. These guardsmen only worsened the situation.

On the next day, May 24, they charged the crowd wounding 12, then firing their rifles and killing one, then later that same day, they fired once again wounding two more picketers. By the 26th of May, with demands that the plant be closed and the Guard withdraw, another tragic confrontation occurred. The crowd attacked the Guard, 200 were injured and 50 were arrested. The plant remained closed for the following week and did not reopen until June 5. At this point, the strikers had emerged victorious. After all the hardships, injuries, and deaths, the union had been established and recognized.

This was a shallow victory at first due to a number of circumstances. First of all, the old workers who remained at work throughout the strike had preference during the rehiring process. Secondly, betrayers who associated themselves with management formed their own bargaining organization called the Auto-Lite Council. This organization acquired for them preference in rehiring. The Auto-Lite Council soon diminished in numbers, while Local 18384 was increasing dramatically. This was due to the realization that the strikers were the ones who had won them collective bargaining, not the Auto-Lite Council.

Therefore, their loyalties lied with the organization that had created the situation in which they had more power, respect, and The Auto-Lite strike is a perfect example of how the labor movement has advanced. The first strike only involved a mediocre 15 men. The second strike reached out to about 50% of the work force. The men and women of Auto-Lite had embraced their union and made it their own. This represents the labor movement because at the start only about million workers were unionized.

At the pinnacle of the movement nearly 50% of the work force was organized, the number was in excess of 10 million individuals. Workers saw how the union could help them. They saw solidarity and unity, which when combined produced a force to be reckoned with. The union provided for higher wages, more benefits, and better working conditions. This idea is what attracted more members and this belief is what united the men and women at Auto-Lite. The strike also represents the risks and hardships accepted by the organizers who take on the challenge of forming a union.

The 15 who went out in the first Auto-Lite strike took the chance of losing their jobs and hampering their families welfare to form a union just to help every worker in the plant. The men also accepted that they were going to lose their jobs and would have to fight for reinstatement. But all the risks taken, and all the brief hardships felt were well worth it considering the ends. Their union was recognized. Not to the extent they wished, but nonetheless they won recognition, which catapulted them to eventual complete victory. This result was not always the case. In some strikes the union failed and the workers lost big.

To the credit of the workers, their supporters, and their organizers the men and women of Auto-Lite were triumphant and won the fight of all fights; to gain respect, power, and recognition. This event was the turning point in labor relations in the city of Toledo. It gave confidence and self worth to the working class, and stripped the company management of their unimpeded omnipotence. The Auto-Lite Strike of 1934 changed the entire way that company operations were run, and for that, those who work in Toledo should be applauded, and recognized for the achievements they accomplished.