

"It Wasn't a Time to Compromise"

The Unionization of Sioux City's Packinghouses, 1937-1942

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I don't think we could have accomplished what we did accomplish without having the backing of John L. Lewis and others in the union. We knew that we had an organization behind us. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been any point of even trying to organize 'cause we'd have been beaten down. We had to have somebody behind us.¹

THE UNIONIZATION of Sioux City's packinghouses in the late 1930s and early 1940s transformed the opportunities of the city's lowliest residents. With the assistance of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and the affiliated Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC), local union activists were able to overcome the determined resistance of the packing companies. By 1943 more than two thousand packinghouse workers were members of the PWOC and had secured contracts that included union recognition, wage increases, a grievance procedure, and strict seniority in hiring, layoffs, and promotion.

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1. Jennie Shuck interview, 2 July 1986, United Packinghouse Workers of America Oral History Project, State Historical Society of Wisconsin (hereafter cited as UPWAOHP).

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The organizing drive initiated by the CIO in 1937–1938 in Sioux City depended on and was led by a distinct group of local union militants. Their strategy, developed under the guidance of a CIO organizer but given shape by the workers themselves, shared important basic features with rank-and-file organizing techniques used in the meatpacking industry elsewhere. Union activists identified workplace grievances that cut across race, ethnicity, and sex. They built strong steward systems and used job actions to empower workers and break through the fear of managerial authority. They tapped ethnic, familial, and neighborhood networks of packinghouse workers, secured support from white and black religious leaders, and brought respected group leaders into the center of the organizing drive. And they used National Labor Relations Board certification elections to give legitimacy to their efforts and to provide a focus for membership recruitment. Through these activities, they hoped to convince coworkers that a labor organization would provide more job security and opportunity for economic advancement than existing company structures and informal employment networks.²

Organizers faced formidable obstacles. The packing companies designed “conference boards” and welfare measures to

2. On the history of unionism in meatpacking, see David Brody, *The Butcher Workmen* (Cambridge, MA, 1964); and James R. Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers, 1894–1922* (Urbana, IL, 1987). On the 1930s in particular, see Larry D. Engelmann, “‘We Were the Poor People’: The Hormel Strike of 1933,” *Labor History* 15 (Fall 1974), 483–510; Paul Street, “Breaking Up Old Hatreds and Breaking Through the Fear: The Emergence of the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee in Chicago, 1933–1940,” *Studies in History and Politics* 5 (1986), 63–82; and Roger Horowitz, “It is Harder to Struggle than to Surrender: The Rank and File Unionism of the United Packinghouse Workers of America, 1933–1948,” *Studies in History and Politics* 5 (1986), 83–96. On regional networks of packinghouse workers based in Austin and Chicago, see Rick Halpern and Roger Horowitz, “The Austin Orbit: Regional Union Organizing in Meat Packing, 1933–1943” (paper delivered at the 1986 Missouri Valley History Conference in Omaha). See also my forthcoming dissertation, “The Path Not Taken: A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930–1960” (University of Wisconsin–Madison); Rick Halpern, “Race and Radicalism in the Chicago Stockyards” (paper presented at the 1987 convention of the Organization of American Historians); and Rick Halpern, “‘Black and White, Unite and Fight’: Race and Labor in Meatpacking, 1904–1948” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1989).

preempt efforts at unionization. When those methods proved insufficient, management arbitrarily dismissed and blacklisted suspected organizers, and employed armed force and strike-breakers during walkouts. Moreover, a devastating strike in 1921–1922 and an abortive organizing drive in 1934–1935, both led by the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen, weighed heavily on the attitudes of pro-union workers and made them reluctant to risk reprisals without better hopes of success.

Sioux City's union pioneers received indispensable assistance from the CIO. By providing an essential alliance with other segments of the industrial working class, the CIO overcame the isolation of Sioux City's packinghouse workers. Successes in auto, steel, and other industries by CIO-affiliated unions lent an aura of legitimacy to the shop floor organizing strategy of local union leaders. The CIO's program of industrial unionism served as an organizational vehicle to unite the different fragments of the work force and a national structure to assist the efforts of isolated union activists.³ The link with the PWOC, by establishing contacts with packinghouse workers in the plants of the same national companies in different urban areas, added to the power of the Sioux City workers. By creating bonds between Sioux City's fledgling unions and locals that already had achieved union recognition, PWOC organizers were able to argue convincingly that victory was indeed possible. Together the CIO and the local union leaders were able to overcome the feelings of isolation and powerlessness that made packinghouse workers reluctant to join a labor organization.

WHEN CIO ORGANIZER Harmon R. Ballard arrived in Sioux City on June 6, 1937, with instructions to initiate an organizing drive in the local packinghouses, he faced a difficult task. "The Trades and Labor Assembly sent me a letter asking me to refrain from organizing any units here," he recounted.

3. Peter Friedlander, *The Emergence of a UAW Local, 1936–1939* (Pittsburgh, 1975); Roger Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers Unions* (New York, 1986); Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana, IL, 1988); Daniel Nelson, *American Rubber Workers and Organized Labor, 1900–1941* (Princeton, NJ, 1988); Ronald W. Schatz, *The Electrical Workers* (Urbana, IL, 1983).

"Every day during our first week, a policeman was stationed at the elevator on our floor. Two to four officers were detailed at every meeting we held in Teutonia Hall for a week." Hostility from local unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) reflected the deep division in the national labor movement as well as the Amalgamated Meat Cutters' jealousy of the CIO's plans. The local Sioux City business elite, highly dependent on the packinghouse industry, feared the effects of unionization. And the packinghouse workers were totally unorganized.⁴

The opposition from the AFL and local businessmen was beyond his control, so Ballard concentrated on his organizing responsibilities. He quickly established contact with packinghouse workers who wanted to bring the CIO into their plants, and hundreds attended a mass meeting on June 24. In August the CIO issued a charter to Local Industrial Union No. 389, with jurisdiction over Sioux City's Armour, Cudahy, and Swift plants.⁵

Ballard's rapid success was due to his ability to tap existing pro-union sentiment among Sioux City packinghouse workers. Most local CIO union pioneers had five to ten years of experience, although a few were older veterans of the 1921-1922 strike. Russian workers, because of their sheer numbers in

4. H. R. Ballard, "Cops Picket Organizer," *Solidarity: A Yearbook of the Iowa-Nebraska States Industrial Union Council* (Sioux City, 1939), 48, 58. In 1929 seven packinghouses employed three thousand workers, more than one-third of Sioux City's industrial work force, with approximately twenty-five hundred working for Armour, Cudahy, and Swift. The packinghouses contributed two-thirds of the value of all manufacturing in Sioux City that year, and accounted for fully 40 percent of Iowa's total meat production. R. L. Polk & Co., *Sioux City Directory*, 1931, 17-18; Iowa Writers' Project, Works Progress Administration, *Woodbury County History* (Sioux City, 1942), 14-15; H. H. McCarty and C. W. Thompson, "Meat Packing in Iowa," *Iowa Studies in Business*, no. 12 (June 1933), 125-26.

5. Ballard, "Cops Picket Organizer," 48, 58; *Unionist and Public Forum*, 1 July 1937; Clyde Wensel interview, 30 June 1986, UPWAOHP; "Intermediate Report by Trial Examiner W. P. Webb in the Matter of Swift and Company and the United Packinghouse Workers Local Industrial Union No. 874 Through the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee (C.I.O.)," 5, NLRB Case Files, Case C-1116, RG 25, Washington National Record Center (hereafter cited as WNRC); "Meat Packing Groups Chartered by the CIO August 16, 1937," CIO Secretary-Treasurer, box 65, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit.

unskilled production jobs and their readiness to support unionism, provided the linchpin of ethnic support for the CIO drive. Blacks, although a relatively small number of packinghouse workers, provided an indispensable source of support on the strategically important killing floors. Finally, a small group of workers with prior union experience, usually native born or from more established immigrant groups (Irish, German, or Scandinavian) and working on higher-paid skilled jobs, provided essential leadership as well.⁶

The importance of Russian packinghouse workers far outweighed other groups, and stemmed from their community's particular history as well as its place in Sioux City's immigrant culture. They lived in the east and south "Bottoms," the flats near the Missouri and Floyd river junction, with other recent immigrants from eastern Europe, Syria, and Turkey, migrants from the American plains, and blacks from the South. The poor, rundown area was physically separated from downtown Sioux City to the west and north by multiple railroad tracks and from the east-side suburbs by the Floyd River. The stockyards, perched along the Missouri River shore, defined the southern border of the neighborhood and provided most of the employment for its residents.⁷

The Russian community was by far the largest immigrant group in the Bottoms neighborhoods. Approximately two thousand Russians lived in Sioux City. They represented more than one-third of the early twentieth-century immigration to Sioux City. The Russians formed a cohesive community of their own, while living intermixed with other immigrants. On days off from work, relatives, neighbors, or friends from the packinghouse would visit, drink coffee or home-brew, talk, and play cards. Children attended neighborhood schools with Poles, Lithuanians, Syrians, and blacks, played together in mixed groups, and later dated and married across ethnic lines. Inter-

6. I have drawn information on starting dates of union activists from city directories. For comparison with the electrical industry, see Ronald Schatz, "Union Pioneers: The Founders of Local Unions at General Electric and Westinghouse, 1933-1937," *Journal of American History* 66 (December 1979), 556-602.

7. Jennie Shuck interviews; Mary Edwards, interview with author, 3 November 1987; Mary and Alvin Edwards interview, 1 July 1986, UPWAOHP.

action between ethnics at work and in the community forged close bonds and helped to develop mutual respect among the different groups. Jennie Shuck later explained, "We didn't have to be told in school that all these people are just as good as you are—we learned to live with them all."⁸

Compared to Sioux City's other ethnics, however, the Russians were far less tied to their church and more open to union activity and radical political ideas. Most non-Jewish Russians were members of the Greek Orthodox Holy Resurrection Church in the East Bottoms; they crowded its small hall for religious celebrations, but did not treat the priest as an important community leader. Factional divisions among Russians were played out as church politics, and usually resulted in replacement of one priest by another, followed within a year by another change in personnel. Between 1916 and 1940 at least fifteen different priests filled the church's pulpit. In contrast to the Russians' casual attitude towards their religious leader, Lithuanian and Polish priests lasted ten or twenty years and were a powerful influence in their respective communities.⁹

8. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*, vol. 2, *Population* (Washington, DC, 1922), 317, 793, 1030–31; Jennie Shuck, interview with author, 3 November 1987; Mary Edwards interview. Edwards recalled, "You go to work, start at 7, come home at 5 . . . then they just sat around, and talked and visit. People would come over, they'd play cards, and every Russian family or Polack family, you go over there and they would always offer you something to drink."

9. Jennie Shuck commented, "there was constant bickering. . . . Everybody thought they ought to be the boss. The poor priests that they would have over there really were not treated very well." Jennie Shuck interview, 3 November 1987; Mabel F. Hoyt, "History of Community House, Sioux City, Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 21 (January 1938), 193; R. L. Polk & Co., *Sioux City Directory*, for the years 1918 to 1940. The weak Russian church in Sioux City was typical of the relationship between the American wing of the Russian Greek Orthodox Church and the Russian immigrants following the 1917 revolution. When Russians founded the Sioux City Holy Resurrection Church in 1916, the American wing of the Russian Greek Orthodox Church had one hundred thousand members and relied on annual contributions of seventy-eight thousand dollars from the Russian czar for its operating expenses. It was a hierarchical institution, with the Russian-appointed archbishop holding title to church property, appointing the pastors, and controlling congregational activities. The 1917 revolution stripped financial support from Russia and, compromised by collaboration with the czar, the American archbishop and his appointed priests lost control over local churches. Committees com-

Weak church authority over civil affairs facilitated the efforts of leftist and pro-union Russians to recruit fellow immigrants to their cause. In 1919 local parishioners deposed priest C. Zakrevsky because of his vocal attacks on radicalism and unionism. "Czarism and priests like Zakrevsky have kept Russian people in darkness for hundreds and hundreds of years," explained a Russian packinghouse worker in a letter to the paper. "Zakrevsky is a former servant of the czar." In November of that year, with the encouragement of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), many Russian packinghouse workers stayed home from work to celebrate the second anniversary of the Russian Revolution. These same workers were active members of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters locals until the disastrous 1921-1922 strike.¹⁰

With this tradition, there was a pool of Russian packinghouse workers ready and willing to join a labor organization with the determination and the resources to have a reasonable chance of success. With his CIO credentials and a long history of activity in the Iowa United Mine Workers, Ballard attracted several influential Russians who were willing to build the union among ethnic production workers. An important early leader was Armour worker John Davidchik, part of a large family active in the local Russian church. Several of his sisters worked at Swift and helped spread the union among the women in their plant. Davidchik became the vice-president of Local 389 in July 1937, and played a leading role in Sioux City's packinghouse unions for several decades.¹¹

posed of local parishioners took control of church property away from the priests and reduced them to hired functionaries responsible only for religious ceremonies, subject to dismissal by the congregation. See Jerome Davis, *The Russian Immigrant* (New York, 1922), 91-101, 118; and Stanford Gerber, "Russkoya Celo: The Ethnography of a Russian-American Community" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1966), 100-106.

10. *Sioux City Journal*, 1 May, 9 November 1919; Mrs. Wallace M. Short, *Just One American* (Sioux City, 1943), 130; Jennie Shuck interviews; Mary Edwards interview.

11. The Davidchik family lived on a farm at the edge of town, and Davidchik's mother was well known among Russians for her clean and well-made Russian cheese and bread sold at local groceries. Clyde Wensel interview; Jennie Shuck interview, 3 November 1987; Mary Edwards interview; *Sioux City Journal*, 22 January 1966.

At Cudahy, Ballard's key recruits were Russians Jennie Shuck and her father, Vladimir Zenkovich. Zenkovich was an army scribe and schoolteacher from Minsk who emigrated in 1907 to avoid further military service. He was an unusual man for the Russian immigrant community—a well-educated, free thinker who refused to attend church. "People had letters from the old country that they couldn't read, they'd come over to have him read them, or have him write a letter for them," recalled his daughter. Literacy was not useful for advancing an immigrant's career in Sioux City, however, so he found work at the Cudahy plant and became one of the highly paid butchers on the beef kill. He joined the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and participated in the 1921–1922 strike, and was still working in Cudahy's beef kill in 1937.¹²

Zenkovich's wife died in childbirth in 1915, when Jennie, his oldest daughter, was only six. When she turned a "tall" fifteen in 1924, Jennie's father asked her to go to work to help support the family. Married in the early 1930s to Paul Shuck, another Russian Cudahy worker, she continued to work, and closely followed the progress of industrial unions, especially the rise of the CIO. When Ballard began organizing in Sioux City, the Zenkovich and Shuck families were among his first recruits at Cudahy. Jennie used her knowledge of Russian, Polish, and Lithuanian to draw the immigrant women in the plant into the union, while her father and her husband encouraged the men on the killing floor to support it. She became a charter member of the local, its first recording secretary, and one of the PWOC's leading female organizers during World War II.¹³

Black workers made up the second key group of CIO union pioneers in Sioux City. Blacks were intermixed with other residents in the South Bottoms, but also lived in a distinct neighborhood on the near West Side. Since steamboats had first

12. Jennie Shuck interviews. Zenkovich's date of emigration was early for the Russian immigrants and coincides with the reaction to the 1905 revolution in Russia. This fact, along with his unusual education and religious views, suggests that he might have been politically active in Russia. Unfortunately, he never discussed his activities in Russia with his daughter. City directories for 1915–1935 confirm his occupation and common residence with Jennie.

13. Jennie Shuck interviews.

called on the town's docks in the late 1850s, blacks had filled the lower rungs of the employment ladder, serving as porters, helpers, and occasional laborers. Their numbers in Sioux City grew from 305 in 1910 to 1,139 in 1920, as packinghouse employment expanded, and black men were able to find work on the killing floors. "The black community totally depended on packing," a founder of the Armour union observed. "They were either a packinghouse worker or a shoeshine boy."¹⁴

Sioux City was not hospitable toward its black residents. Racial prejudice, discrimination, and segregation were widespread, especially among the older immigrant groups and the native-born elite. Blacks mixed freely with the new immigrants in the Bottoms neighborhood, and their children attended the same schools, but their territory in Sioux City proper was strictly circumscribed. Whites fled when the black community expanded in the teens, twenties, and thirties, selling their homes as soon as a black family moved onto their block. Blacks were restricted to the balconies in local theaters, and were well aware of the informal limits to their movement in town. A park on West Third Street bordered the black neighborhood, but was unsafe for blacks to use in the 1930s. "If you did, you'd be liable to get your head whupped," recalled Sam Davis, a teenager at the time, "because it was the white district."¹⁵

Black workers generally were early supporters of the union, but played a subordinate role in the formation and subsequent leadership of the locals. They constituted between 5 and 10 percent of the packinghouse work force in Sioux City,

14. *Woodbury County History*, 145; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Statistics for Iowa* (Washington, DC, 1913), 624; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*, vol. 3, *Population* (Washington, DC, 1922), 329; Clyde Wensel interview; Sam Davis interview, 1 July 1986, UPWAOHP. A WPA-sponsored survey of Sioux City in the mid-1930s showed that 129 blacks held packinghouse jobs, four times the number in any other job category. "Tabulation as to Economic Status as to Type of Work and the Number," Works Progress Administration (WPA) Papers, series A, box 142, Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

15. Sam Davis interview; *Woodbury County History*, 148; Johnny Shores, interview with author, 3 November 1987. Jennie Shuck recalled attending school and playing with black children, and one of their mothers would watch her after school until her father got off work. Jennie Shuck interview, 3 November 1987.

with close to one hundred blacks at Cudahy, about thirty at Armour, and fewer than fifteen at Swift, the smallest plant. The men vastly outnumbered the women and overwhelmingly worked on key killing floor butcher jobs such as splitters and headers, while the women were restricted to the casings departments. Well-known Golden Glove boxer Clayton Johnson, along with fellow Cudahy beef kill workers Johnny Shores and Dewey Cardwell, were among the first to join the union. At Armour, early union leader Elder "Mojo" Owens was one of three cattle splitters and a highly respected figure in the South Bottoms. Blacks who entered the plants as strikebreakers in 1921 tended to oppose the union, but their numbers were quite small.¹⁶

The most visible and influential black leader was Arthell Shelton, a Swift beef kill worker who served as recording secretary of interplant Local 389 and became the first president of the Swift union. Known as "Sweet Potato" among his contemporaries, Shelton's past is shrouded in mystery. He started working at Swift in 1930 and lived in the South Bottoms neighborhood. He was a tough character; coworkers knew that "Sweet Potato ain't nothing to mess with." Once he became active in the union, Shelton was attracted to the core of black activists from Chicago's packinghouses, especially PWOC National Director Hank Johnson and union founder Jesse Vaughn. Shelton either joined or was very close to the Communist party.¹⁷

Most of the rest of the union pioneers came from a mixed group of radicals and former union members led by Cudahy

16. "Blacks in Packinghouses," WPA Papers, series A, box 142; Clyde Wensel interview; Sam Davis interview; Johnny Shores interview; Grant Holbrook, interview with author, 2 November 1987; Bruce Nolan and Grant Holbrook interview, 3 July 1986, UPWAOHP. There are some reports of blacks being brought in as strikebreakers in 1921, but the number of blacks in Sioux City fell from 1,139 in 1920 to 1,064 in 1930 with a decline in the male population, while the number of women grew slightly. This indicates that the importation of black strikebreakers had only a marginal impact on the black packinghouse work force.

17. Sam Davis interview; Jesse Vaughn interview, 4 October 1985, UPWAOHP; R. L. Polk & Co., *Sioux City Directory*, 1930. On Shelton's links with the Communist party, see the affidavits in the Ralph Helstein Papers, box 3, State Historical Society of Wisconsin (hereafter referred to as SHSW).

worker Bruce Nolan. Nolan worked as a migratory agricultural laborer for much of the 1920s, and encountered the IWW in his many travels. He briefly owned a dairy farm outside Sioux City and participated in the confrontational Farmers Holiday milk strike of 1932, only to lose his farm when the banks closed in 1933. Destitute, he was able to get work at Cudahy by claiming to be a hog splitter, although he actually had no packinghouse experience. Ballard easily drew him into the organizing drive. "I was a rebel here in town," Nolan recalled, "it wasn't a time to compromise."¹⁸

For several years prior to Ballard's arrival in Sioux City, Nolan had established a network of union activists at Cudahy, concentrated in the mechanical division. This group included Tom Morley, a former IWW member; Frank "Fox" Lavenger, a 1921 strike veteran; Berth Madison, a Scandinavian with union experience; and Pete Gaaul, a former member of the International Association of Machinists. Through Nolan, Ballard was able to bring this entire group into Local 389.¹⁹

Aside from a few individuals, however, leftist organizations did not assume an important role in the organizing drive. The Communist party sent several organizers to Sioux City and had considerable influence inside the PWOC apparatus, but was unable to recruit more than a handful of workers. The Socialists had fewer than ten members—holdovers from the 1910s and a few who joined in the early 1930s—and no contacts among industrial workers. The IWW left a stronger mark on packinghouse workers than either of these groups, but individuals who were influenced by it, such as Nolan and Morley, acted as individuals and not as an organized leftist force.²⁰

18. Bruce Nolan, interview with author, 3 November 1987.

19. These unionists closely followed organizing drives in meatpacking elsewhere, especially the progress of the Independent Union of All Workers in the Austin Hormel plant. Bruce Nolan interview, 3 November 1987; Bruce Nolan and Grant Holbrook interview; Grant Holbrook interview.

20. On Communist party activities, see Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism* (New York, 1984), 138–40. According to Klehr, the Iowa Communist party had only 157 members in June 1937. See also John L. Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion* (Urbana, IL, 1965), 83; *Union Advocate*, 11 August 1932; *Unionist and Public Forum*, 23 August 1934, 18 April 1935, 27 May 1937, 19 February 1938. Iowa-Nebraska PWOC regional director Don Harris

Older ethnic and black workers who had participated in the 1921–1922 strike also generally supported the CIO drive. They tended to be cautious and highly suspicious of the Amalgamated, which they blamed for the 1921–1922 disaster. They interacted with a younger generation in the plant from their respective neighborhoods, and had considerable influence on the course of events in the late 1930s. “People were going to listen to them,” recalled Nolan; “it was a case of convincing them that this was going to be a union that was different.”²¹

As a general rule, women were slower to express support for the union by joining and accepting responsibility. Only exceptional women without children and from active union households, such as Sophie Ferdig at Swift and Jennie Shuck at Cudahy, played leadership roles in the early stages. Recruiting women to the union simply as members, however, was not difficult once success seemed possible. Jennie Shuck brought her entire hog casing department into the union and had particular success among the immigrants, “especially these older women who came over from the old country. They knew what degradation [was] and how they were treated back there by the landowners.”²²

The union pioneers who provided leadership for the 1937–1938 organizing drive were a diverse group bridging ethnic,

and organizer James Porter were Communist party members, but played no role in Sioux City until the 1938 Swift strike. See the statement from Archie Helm, n.d.; Affidavits by Ben Henry, 18 July 1940; H. R. Ballard to J. C. Lewis, 1 August 1940; Affidavit by James P. Dean, 22 December 1939; all in box 3, Ralph Helstein Papers, SHSW. On Socialists, see Ames Local, Socialist Party, “Analysis of the Iowa Farmer-Labor Party,” 17 March 1936, box 10, folder 4, Roland White Papers, SHSW; A. M. Prescott to Roland White, 29 July 1936; Roland White to Prescott, 22 July 1936; Sioux City Socialist Party to Mary Elva Sather, 9 April 1936; all in box 10, folder 6, Roland White Papers, SHSW; Bruce Nolan interview.

21. Bruce Nolan and Grant Holbrook interview; Bruce Nolan interview.

22. Jennie Shuck interview, 2 July 1986. Sophie Ferdig’s husband was very active in the union. See her testimony in “Transcript of Proceedings before the NLRB in the Matter of Swift and Company and United Packing House Workers Local Industrial Union No. 874 Through the Packing House Workers Organizing Committee (C.I.O.),” Cases C-1116 and R-1125, NLRB Records, RG 25, “Transcripts and Exhibits,” boxes 1531–33, pp. 1670–1701, WNRC (hereafter cited as “Transcripts and Exhibits,” Cases C-1116 and R-1125). See also Mary Elizabeth Pidgeon, *The Employment of Women in Slaughtering and Meat Packing* (Washington, DC, 1932).

racial, and gender lines. As leaders of their respective constituencies, they brought networks of followers into the PWOC, and persuaded community leaders, most notably black and white clergy, to come out in public support of the unionization of the packinghouses. The hundreds of workers attending the PWOC's rally on June 24, 1937, reflected both the close links between the union pioneers and their supporters and the attractiveness of a CIO organization to these militant workers. Nonetheless, they still needed to overcome the tactics of the packing companies which had been carefully honed in the past to defeat prior organizing drives.²³

ANY EFFORT to organize strong industrial unions in Sioux City's packinghouses had to overcome the weight of previous defeats and the determined efforts of the companies to win the loyalties of their workers. In 1921-1922 the collapse of a national strike by the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen destroyed the union locals that had flourished during World War I in meatpacking centers such as Sioux City. Despite determined resistance by Sioux City's packinghouse workers and passionate support from the entire Bottoms community, hundreds of sheriff's deputies allowed the companies to operate their plants at reduced levels. The Bottoms residents, never in a secure economic position, suffered terribly during the long strike fought during subzero temperatures. "The 1921 strike devastated this part of Sioux City," recalled Jennie Shuck. "I knew that we were hungry, our shoes were soled and half-soled and half-soled again because Dad didn't have the money." In early February union members had little option but to endorse the "settlement" proposed by Amalgamated leaders: "Back to work, those who can get a job, and if you don't get a job you're out of luck."²⁴

23. Clyde Wensel interview; Bruce Nolan interview; Affidavits by Father E. J. Smith and George M. Cesna, in "In the Matter of the Cudahy Company and United Packinghouse Workers Local Industrial Union No. 873, Affiliated with P.W.O.C. and C.I.O. Report of Objections," NLRB Case Files, Cases C-901 and R-1134, RG 25, WNRC. Cesna was the priest at St. Casimir Catholic Church, the Lithuanian church in the packinghouse workers' neighborhood.

24. Peter Ecker, "Labor and Social Disorders in Sioux City," n.d., 10-16,

The collapse of the strike left a bitter legacy. Of the twelve hundred workers who reapplied for work, only 250 were rehired. Many left the area completely. Bitterness toward the packing companies and the union that had failed sunk deep roots into the Bottoms residents who struggled to recoup their losses over the next few years. A contemporary writing in the 1930s observed, "Yet today, more than fifteen years since, the packing house strike is vivid in the memory of some men who were never rehired, unemployed except for occasional odd jobs."²⁵

In the aftermath of the strike, the packing companies devised a network of welfare policies designed to encourage loyalty. Employment security through limited seniority systems, vacations, and social activities such as athletics sought to reduce turnover among more seasoned employees and to engender pro-company attitudes. A business-sponsored sandlot baseball league and weekly boxing matches between clubs of packinghouse employees drew large crowds in the middle 1920s. Sioux City's minor league baseball team collapsed in 1924 because business-sponsored sporting events drew away many of its fans.²⁶

The companies also installed plant conference boards as a mechanism for worker representation that did not challenge managerial authority. At Swift, for example, seven employee representatives elected by workers and seven from management met periodically to pass motions and discuss problems in

series A, box 142, WPA Papers; *Woodbury County History*, 146-48; Thomas P. Christensen, "An Industrial History of Woodbury County," in *Unionist and Public Forum*, 22 August, 22 September 1940; William H. Cumberland, Wallace M. Short: *Iowa Rebel* (Ames, 1983), 64-67; Jennie Shuck interview, 2 July 1986; *Sioux City Journal*, 2 February 1922. During the strike a striker shot the son of the Woodbury County sheriff and was killed in turn. Following the incident, both daily newspapers ran extra editions calling for more deputies and helping to recruit them for the sheriff's department. Ecker, "Labor and Social Disorders, 14-15."

25. Ecker, "Labor and Social Disorders," 16; *Woodbury County History*, 148; Christensen, "Industrial History," in *Unionist and Public Forum*, 22 September 1940.

26. Memorandum of Company Policies, reproduced in "Intermediate Report," Case C-1116; Peter Ecker, "Sioux City Baseball, 1924," series A, box 142, WPA Papers.

the plant. Swift traffic manager Frank Logman served as chairman throughout the 1920s and 1930s and could cast a deciding vote in the event of a tie. Motions required only a simple majority for approval, but decisions on grievances took a two-thirds vote. With these rules management could prevent any action that conflicted with their plans while having a mechanism for ascertaining discontent on the shop floor. Armour and Cudahy had similar arrangements.²⁷

Participation in the conference boards reflected a pragmatic decision by packinghouse workers without viable alternatives. Though small matters might be resolved in meetings between worker representatives and management, basic company policies towards their employees were not negotiable. Seniority was only one of several criteria for rehiring laid-off employees, and the arbitrary power of the foremen still defined shop floor relations. Low pay, irregular hours, frequent layoffs, and harsh working conditions remained major grievances which could not be rectified through the management-dominated conference boards. "There's no point complaining about it, or trying to take up a grievance about it, because you might get fired," complained Jennie Shuck. "You had no security, no job security at all."²⁸

The depression and declining income for packinghouse workers removed the material basis for the packing companies' cooptative policies. With Sioux City's economy hinged to meatpacking, "everybody was suffering except the bootleggers," recalled Jennie Shuck. "Men were laid off by the hundreds and, of course, the packers they were taking advantage of that." Wage cuts and short hours cut income drastically, and

27. *Decision Order and Direction of Election—In the Matter of Swift and Company and United Packing House Workers Local Industrial Union No. 874 Through the Packing House Workers Organizing Committee (C.I.O.)*, Cases C-1116 and R-1125, 21 NLRB 1069; "Transcripts and Exhibits," 2793–2897, Cases C-1116 and R-1125; Bruce Nolan and Grant Holbrook interview; Clyde Wensel interview; *Decision Order and Direction of Election—In the Matter of the Cudahy Packing Company and United Packinghouse Workers Local Industrial Union No. 873, Affiliated with the P.W.O.C. and C.I.O.*, Cases C-901 and R-1134, 15 NLRB 681.

28. Jennie Shuck interview, 2 July 1986; Bruce Nolan and Grant Holbrook interview.

families survived on food grown in their back yards, and fish and small game caught along the river.²⁹

As a result of these conditions, the Amalgamated Meat Cutters were able briefly to establish locals in the three major plants in 1934. The organization quickly evaporated when the packing companies refused to negotiate with the unions and the Amalgamated would not call a strike to demand union recognition. After widespread layoffs in late 1934 and a small wage increase, workers dropped out of the Amalgamated in droves, and left the locals an empty shell by May 1935. "Everybody knew it was because of the organization that these packers got so big-hearted all of a sudden," complained labor columnist Harold Sturgeon, "but the packers chalked up the credit to the Plant Conference Board company union."³⁰

In the 1937-1938 organizing drive, unionists sought to convince workers that the PWOC could succeed where the Amalgamated had failed. They argued that industrial unions could provide more material benefits and employment security than company-sanctioned mechanisms, and pointed to the victories of the CIO in other industries. The union pioneers drew on the local packinghouse workers' own desire to develop power inside the plants against company domination, and appealed to their common interests, regardless of differences in race, sex, language, or church. The combination of workplace grievances and the possibility of success, organizers hoped, would be enough to overcome the defeats of 1921-1922 and 1934-1935.

For families without savings and dependent on regular weekly wages, the potential benefits of the union had to be balanced against the risks of membership and the alternative forms of representation and advancement sanctioned by the

29. Jennie Shuck interview, 3 November 1987; Suzanne O'Dea Schenken, "Mary J. Treglia: A Community Leader" (M.A. thesis, Iowa State University, 1987), 58. Home construction fell from 154 houses in 1929 to only 46 in 1933. In 1925, 609 new homes were built. R. L. Polk & Co., *Sioux City Directory*, 1931, 17; *Woodbury County History*, 161; Christensen, "Industrial History," in *Unionist and Public Forum*, 31 August 1940; *Unionist and Public Forum*, 25 January, 25 October 1934, 28 March, 2 May, 13 June 1935, 1 July 1937; *Sioux City Journal*, 30 April and 5 May 1934.

30. *Unionist and Public Forum*, 14 December 1933, 1 February, 3 March, 17 and 24 May 1934, 2 May 1935.

employers. Supervisors strongly "encouraged" employees to join company unions and to elect delegates to plantwide work councils. Officials of these organizations collected dues in the packinghouses during working hours with the permission of management. Family and ethnic networks, reinforced by fraternal orders such as the Masons, provided hiring and promotion tracks for workers with connections to foremen. Given these alternatives, the union's appeal of advancement through united collective action by all workers did not necessarily meet a favorable reception.³¹

After Ballard constituted an initial core of organizers, activists went door-to-door in Sioux City's packinghouse district in the summer of 1937, recruiting workers regardless of their particular workplace into Local 389. Organizing within the plant was furtive, on the sly in dressing rooms or on breaks, so as to avoid the watchful eye of the company unions, stool pigeons, and supervisors. Organizers promised higher wages, fringe benefits, job security through seniority, a powerful shop steward system, and union representation. While H. R. Ballard coordinated overall union operations, the CIO sent no more paid organizers to Sioux City, leaving local packinghouse workers largely to their own resources.³²

Particular characteristics shaped each plant's organizing drive, but several general patterns emerged. First, in all three facilities the killing floor men were the first to join, and the union used this base to support organizers in other departments. Second, as soon as possible the union tried to assert its presence on the shop floor by wearing CIO union buttons, appointing stewards, or presenting grievances. Third, when the companies resisted tacit or explicit recognition of the union, organizers used job actions to force consideration of their demands.

31. Alvin Edwards recalled that many Swift foremen belonged to the Masons, and many workers joined the Masons in order to receive preferential treatment from management. Mary and Alvin Edwards interview, 1 July 1986, UPWAOHP; Bruce Nolan and Grant Holbrook interview. On the practices of company unions, see *Decision Order and Direction of Election*, Cases C-1116 and R-1125, 1075; *Decision Order and Direction of Election*, Cases C-901 and R-1134, 681-92.

32. Clyde Wensel interview; Jennie Shuck interview, 2 July 1986; Grant Holbrook interview; Bruce Nolan and Grant Holbrook interview.

ALL OF THE PACKINGHOUSES resisted the union organizing drive, but the Swift management was by far the most intransigent. At Armour and Cudahy the unions gradually were able to increase their strength through a series of job actions and struggles over grievances. At Swift, however, the company refused all union overtures and provoked a major strike lasting from September 29, 1938, through January 1939. A detailed investigation by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) into the causes of the strike provides extraordinary insight into the process of unionization at Swift.³³

For the first nine months of the organizing drive, between June 1937 and March 1938, the union grew slowly at Swift by expanding its core on the beef, hog, and sheep killing floors despite persistent harassment and intimidation by company supervisors. Arthell Shelton, with ten years of experience working in the beef kill, served as the overall leader of the Swift unionists. Sam Malinosky, a Russian veteran of the 1921 strike at Cudahy, was the first person to join in the hog kill, and Earl Sutherland, another South Bottoms resident, started the union in the sheep kill. By the end of 1937 the killing floor workers "got to wearing their badges," recalled Alvin Edwards, "and the foreman, he was about nuts. Of course, the company was on him to get everybody to take their badges off, and they wouldn't do it."³⁴

33. In its investigation the NLRB obtained the union's membership cards and used this information to produce a list of CIO members at Swift with the date they signed their membership card. Combined with a department-by-department breakdown of the work force obtained from Swift by NLRB investigators, I was able to determine the date individuals joined the union in each department. Since pro-union sentiments and activity were likely to precede actual membership in the organization, using this information might slightly understate the rate of growth of the union. Nonetheless, the importance attached to formal membership by union organizers, and accompanying information concerning management harassment of union members in particular departments, indicate that an analysis based on the date of membership on CIO cards is largely accurate. "Intermediate Report," Exhibits 2 and 4, Case C-1116.

34. "Transcripts and Exhibits," Cases C-1116 and R-1125, 296-496, 670-99; Jennie Shuck interview, 3 November 1987; *Decision Order and Direction of Election*, Cases C-1116 and R-1125, 1178; Mary and Alvin Edwards interview.

A major obstacle to the CIO drive was the strength of the Swift Employees Security League (ESL), whose leaders were former employee representatives to Swift's Assembly. Swift granted exclusive recognition to the ESL in June 1937, and signed a contract with it which merely reprinted policies implemented unilaterally by the company in 1934. Swift management discussed grievances with ESL representatives and allowed its stewards to collect dues and recruit members during working hours, while denying similar privileges to the CIO.³⁵

CIO unionists at Swift contemptuously dismissed the ESL as a "sewing circle" that had no power to compel management to recognize workers' grievances. They systematically undermined the ESL and expanded their base by militantly demanding recognition of CIO stewards and their right to represent workers in negotiations with management. Their contemptuous dismissal of the ESL steadily gained authority as the ESL representatives proved unable to resolve shop-floor problems and unwilling to use pressure tactics against managerial intransigence. Between April 1938 and the September strike, as the company union's ineffectiveness became apparent, the CIO recruited key ESL leaders, extended their organization into old ESL strongholds, and isolated the few remaining ESL activists.³⁶

In April 1938 management's refusal to meet with Local 389 leaders over plant grievances brought a new wave of workers into the CIO. Henry Jansen, a former Assembly representative, resigned as ESL steward in the beef kill in April and joined the CIO. Seventeen more beef kill workers joined in rapid succession, including ESL steward Harold Flea, giving the CIO thirty-three members out of thirty-nine in the department. Large numbers of workers also joined from the curing cellars and the beef casing, stock food, and sanitation departments. In the hog cut, Alex Malinosky, brother of Sam Malinosky in the hog kill, joined the union in early May despite repeated ha-

35. After the U.S. Supreme Court found the National Labor Relations Act constitutional in 1937, former representatives to Swift's Assembly reconstituted themselves as the ESL. *Decision Order and Direction of Election*, Cases C-1116 and R-1125, 1179-81; "Intermediate Report," Case C-1116, 4-18.

36. *Decision Order and Direction and Election*, Cases C-1116 and R-1125, 1181-82.

rassment for wearing a CIO button. At the end of June 1938 the union had 157 members, 35 percent of the plant's work force.³⁷

Swift workers also were well aware that the PWOC was gaining strength at other packinghouses. Next door at Armour, unionists had secured NLRB certification and were able to settle grievances through job actions and pressure by stewards. On June 26 a "victory parade" sponsored by Local 389 and the Women's Auxiliaries brought a thousand packinghouse workers and union supporters into a march through the center of town. Workers carrying signs and placards surrounded large colorful floats built by union members, while a marching band led the enthusiastic parade. Speakers included Hank Johnson, the black assistant national director of the PWOC, and local union leaders, along with Sioux City mayor David Loepp and two city council members.³⁸

In the summer of 1938 the largest group of non-union workers in the Swift plant, aside from the mechanical division, were the Russian, Polish, and other immigrant women in the sausage and casings departments. Only two had joined by the end of June, although almost twenty men from those departments were union members. A few women in the sausage department joined in early July, but the real breakthrough came August 1 when seven women and two men signed union cards on the same day. This group included Mary Borschuk, a Russian from the South Bottoms and future financial secretary of the local, and Lucille Cramm, later a member of the bargaining committee. Women in hog and sheep casings started to come into the union after John Davidchik's sister Zena joined in late August, at the prompting of her sister in the sausage depart-

37. "Intermediate Report," Case C-1116, 4-14, and Exhibits 2 and 4; *Decision Order and Direction of Election*, Cases C-1116 and R-1125, 1178. R. L. Polk & Co., *Sioux City Directory*, 1925, indicates that Alex boarded at the home rented by Sam Malinosky at 313 South Wall. In subsequent city directories Alex's last name is spelled several different ways, but the same spelling as Sam is used in the lists reprinted in the NLRB Intermediate Report.

38. *Decision Order and Direction of Election—In the Matter of Armour & Company and United Packing House Workers Industrial Local Union No. 389 Affiliated with CIO*, Case R-658, 7 NLRB 710; *Packinghouse News*, mimeographed by L.I.U. #389, vol. 1, no. 30 (27 May 1938), vol. 1, no. 34 (24 June 1938), and vol. 1, no. 35, in "Rejected Exhibits," NLRB Case C-901, Administrative Division, box 635, RG 25, WNRC; *Unionist and Public Forum*, 30 June 1938.

ment. On September 1, 62.5 percent of the work force in these predominantly female departments were union members, higher than the percentage for the plant as a whole.³⁹

Growth of the union at Swift and the other plants led to the separation of Local 389 into three units, one for each packinghouse, in early August. The Armour union kept the Local 389 designation as it had the largest number of union members in the interplant local at that time. Seventy-five percent of the Cudahy work force belonged to the union by mid-September, and stewards regularly used departmental job actions as a check on shop floor managerial practices. "That was only possible," recalled Bruce Nolan, "because the people were getting sold that the union was the thing."⁴⁰

In September, as the union consolidated its hold in many departments and organized new, previously weak areas, pressure grew on Swift to meet with CIO representatives. Union membership approached 100 percent on the killing floors, and workers on the loading dock, in pork lean trim, the beef cooler, and beef cut streamed into the organization. This dynamic growth created problems for the union, as it was caught between management's intransigence and pressure from new members to settle shop floor disputes. "Every membership meeting that we have," complained Shelton, "the workers are always having grievances, and some grievances that have been standing for a year or two, we can't get them settled and we don't have any way of discussing them."⁴¹

The conflict came to a head in late September. Ernest Seward, a hog kill steward, complained that his pay had been cut due to a transfer into another department. His foremen rebuffed the grievance, and plant superintendent Krebs refused

39. "Intermediate Report," Case C-1116, Exhibits 2 and 4.

40. Clyde Wensel interview; Mary and Alvin Edwards interview; *Packinghouse News*, mimeographed by L.I.U. #389, vol. 1, no. 30 (27 May 1938), and vol. 1, no. 34 (24 June 1938), in "Rejected Exhibits," NLRB Case C-901, Administrative Division, box 635, RG 25, WNRC; *Decision Order and Direction of Election*, Cases C-901 and R-1134, 690-96; J. Wiener to Nathan Witt, 17 September 1938, NLRB Case Files, Case R-1134, RG 25, WNRC; Jennie Shuck interview, 2 June 1986; Bruce Nolan and Grant Holbrook interview.

41. "Intermediate Report," Case C-1116, Exhibits 2 and 4; "Transcripts and Exhibits," Cases C-1116 and R-1125, 338.

to discuss the dispute with the department's five-member CIO grievance committee. Infuriated, the union membership met and decided to call for a strike in order to compel management to meet with union committees.⁴²

At ten o'clock on the morning of September 29, close to one hundred killing floor workers stopped work and demanded that Swift recognize the authority of the CIO's grievance committee. Contrary to the union leaders' expectation of a quick victory, Superintendent Krebs refused to modify his previous position and rejected the union's demand to negotiate. As the debate proceeded for several hours under the shadow of cattle, pig, and sheep carcasses in various stages of dismemberment, the killing gangs remained on the floor, surrounded company personnel, and prevented foremen from continuing the slaughtering process. Soon the animals started to spoil, and adjacent departments ground to a halt in support of the stoppage.⁴³

In the early afternoon Swift informed the killing floor gangs that they either had to resume work or leave the premises, or else they would be fired. Workers ignored the threat, maintained the occupation of key departments, and paid no attention when supervisors distributed discharge slips. Any possibility of compromise was eliminated in the late afternoon, when the Woodbury County sheriff, at Swift's request, arrested seventeen union leaders for violating Iowa's conspiracy laws. Women workers left the plant at 4:30, but most of the men remained until one o'clock in the morning, when they learned that the sheriff planned to return and make more arrests.⁴⁴

On the day of the strike, 291 workers, 65 percent of the production employees, were members of the union. Many who were not in the CIO participated in the stoppage and joined the union immediately thereafter, including three former ESL leaders. The twenty-one identified union leaders had an average of eight years of seniority and came from the three killing gangs, the hog and beef cuts, and the sausage and casings depart-

42. "Intermediate Report," Case C-1116, 27-30; *Decision Order and Direction of Election*, Cases C-1116 and R-1125, 1184-85.

43. "Intermediate Report," Case C-1116, 30-34; *Decision Order and Direction of Election*, Cases C-1116 and R-1125, 1185-86; "Transcript and Exhibits," Cases C-1116 and R-1125, 338.

44. *Ibid.*

ments. The 165 discharged workers were all CIO members and included Local 869's key leaders and workers from the strongest union departments.⁴⁵

For Swift workers, other packinghouse unionists, and the CIO in Iowa, the strike in Sioux City became a test of the strength and determination of the organization. Picket lines shut the plant on September 30 and for the first three weeks of October. The Sioux City police, under the authority of labor-backed Commissioner of Public Safety Harold Sturgeon, did not (or could not) enforce a court injunction against mass picketing. Statewide industrial union councils in Iowa, Nebraska, and Minnesota declared a boycott of Swift products, and CIO locals in Des Moines donated fifty tons of coal. The women's auxiliaries of the Swift and Cudahy locals operated a strike kitchen, relying on donations of food from local merchants and farmers. The PWOC sponsored a tour by Swift striker Alice Kozlowski through Chicago and other packing centers to raise money for the Sioux City struggle.⁴⁶

Swift negotiators rejected union proposals to rehire the discharged workers or to meet with union committees, and tried to break the strike by organizing a back-to-work movement. Led by former ESL president Clarence Johnson, strikebreakers twice attempted to enter the plant on October 18. Strikers repelled the first group of scabs after the police pulled back from a confrontation, but later in the day, under the protection of sheriff's deputies, the strikebreakers broke through the picket lines. Deputies armed with riot batons, water hoses, and tear gas fought a pitched battle against one thousand enraged strikers and supporters from the Bottoms neighborhoods who tried to storm the plant and evict the scabs. Quiet returned the next day after 260 National Guard troops armed with rifles and fixed bayonets excluded pickets from the area adjacent to the packinghouse.⁴⁷

45. "Intermediate Report," Exhibits 2 and 4, Case C-1116. By union leaders, I am referring to stewards, officers, and members of the executive board and bargaining committee.

46. Scot Alan Sorensen, "Law Enforcement During the 1930's in Sioux City, Iowa" (M.A. thesis, University of South Dakota, 1976), 44-46; *C.I.O. News—Packinghouse Worker Edition*, 14 November, 12 and 19 December 1938.

47. "Transcripts and Exhibits," Cases C-1116 and R-1125, 2573-74;

The strike lost strength after the October 18 riot. The National Guard and sheriff's department allowed strikebreakers to enter the plant, and forty union leaders were jailed in December for riotous behavior and other felonies. Large rallies bringing hundreds of CIO unionists and packinghouse workers from other cities could not counteract the dwindling financial resources of the young union and its impoverished and unemployed members. Swift rejected one proposal after another, including plans to establish impartial arbitration boards of local citizens or individuals appointed by the governor. In December the women's auxiliary spent the last of its money organizing a Christmas party for the families of the Swift strikers.⁴⁸

In January 1939 the NLRB Trial Examiner's Intermediate Report bolstered the union by finding Swift guilty of illegally supporting the ESL and refusing to bargain with the CIO. The examiner ruled that the CIO represented a majority of Swift's employees on September 29 and that all discharged workers had a right to their jobs because of the company's unfair labor practices. With this leverage, the union offered to call off the strike if Swift promised to rehire 101 of the 165 discharged workers with back pay, but without any seniority. NLRB attorney Lee Loevinger tried to dissuade the union from making that deal, but Don Harris informed him that "the union feels forced to accept this because of the financial condition of both the organization and the individual members." When Swift agreed to the offer in late January, the strike officially came to an end.⁴⁹

Despite brave words to the public and to its members, the strike shattered the union organization at the Swift plant. Key union leaders such as Shelton and most of the killing floor

Sorensen, "Law Enforcement," 48, 52-54; Don Pinkston, "Men Against Money: An Epic that Needs the Writing—The Story of the Sioux City Swift Strike," *Solidarity: A Yearbook of the Iowa-Nebraska States Industrial Union Council* (Sioux City, 1939), 19-22.

48. *C.I.O. News—Packinghouse Worker Edition*, 12 and 19 December 1938, 2 January 1939; Attorneys Gillespie, Burke, and Gillespie to the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee, 10 April 1939, box 8, folder 11, UPWA Papers, SHSW.

49. "Intermediate Report," Case C-1116; Lee Loevinger to Charles Fahy, 21 January 1939, NLRB Case Files, Case C-1116, WNRC.

workers lost their jobs permanently. Rehired strikers lost all seniority and job rights, and often were sent to poorer jobs than those they had held previously. CIO membership fell to just over one hundred at the Swift plant, and this intimidated group did not resume the organizing drive. In the spring of 1940 the NLRB issued its ruling in the case, holding that Swift illegally supported the ESL, but that the union had engaged in an illegal plant occupation prohibited under the recent *Fansteel* ruling of the United States Supreme Court. Hence, the NLRB overturned the Trial Examiner and ruled that the 157 workers who had stayed in the plant were legally fired. This ruling ended the last hope of the discharged workers.⁵⁰

LEFT ON THEIR OWN, the Swift workers would not have been able to rebuild their union after the 1938–1939 strike. Although the NLRB had identified the local as representing a majority of the workers on September 19, 1938, it had also sanctioned the dismissal of the union's strongest members. Indeed, its 1940 decision stated that the union no longer represented a majority of the Swift workers, removing any legal pressure on the management to negotiate. The NLRB's ruling complemented the repression of mass picketing by sheriff's deputies and the National Guard, drawing on farmers and small businessmen in Woodbury County outside of Sioux City. The hostility of government agencies and non-working-class residents paralleled the 1921–1922 experience of packinghouse workers, and, all other factors being equal, would have discouraged a renewed organizing drive.

This time, however, the Swift workers were not on their own. The class-based alliance with other packinghouse workers in Sioux City and other midwestern meatpacking centers provided sufficient support for them to make a dramatic comeback in just three years. In 1939 the PWOC national office hired several former Swift union leaders, and Sioux City's other packinghouse locals forced their companies to employ qualified

50. *C.I.O. News—Packinghouse Worker Edition*, 6 March 1939; "Informal Report, 18th Region, Week Ending April 1, 1939"; Robert J. Wiener to Gerhard P. Van Arkel, 14 July 1939; both in NLRB Case Files, Case C-1116, WNRC; Mary and Alvin Edwards interview; *Decision Order and Direction of Election*, Cases C-1116 and R-1125, 1188, 1192–94.

butchers discharged by Swift. With close to two thousand union members, the Cudahy and Armour locals were able to sustain the remaining union members at Swift and to support renewed efforts in 1941 and 1942 to rebuild the local. Paid organizer and former Swift worker Tony Stephens, discharged in the strike and convicted of a felony, led the PWOC drive in 1942 which resulted in a successful April certification election. A tight labor market, due to World War II, doubtless helped as well, but was not sufficient by itself to spark a new organizing initiative.⁵¹

The Swift strike also seemed to strengthen the Armour and Cudahy unions. Both plants sent large numbers of members to help the smaller Swift union block entrances to the plant, and several Armour and Cudahy workers were arrested as participants in the October 18 riot. In late December the Armour union shut down the plant after management fired union president Clarence Knox for circulating a petition. After two hours the company accepted union demands to rehire Knox and his supporters without discrimination, and to settle all outstanding grievances. A few days later it was Cudahy's turn to feel union power as 120 union stewards brought the plant to a halt for fifty minutes by blowing whistles at the start and end of the job action. There were few non-union workers in either packinghouse by February 1939.⁵²

The defeat of the Swift strike and the dismissal of its main leaders left a negative legacy as well. The departure of Arthell Shelton from his home town eliminated the only local black union leader. Black workers never again played key leadership roles, although they remained strong supporters of the organization. The local unions also learned to respect the limits on official union activity. The dismissal of 154 Swift workers, sanc-

51. Grant Holbrook interview; *Packinghouse Worker*, 1 May 1942; Tony Stephens to Sam Sponseller, 6 December 1941, box 5, folder 3, UPWA Papers, SHSW. For membership figures, see "Financial Report, PWOC" for August 1942–August 1943, box 66, CIO Secretary-Treasurer Papers.

52. Attorneys Gillespie, Burke, and Gillespie to the Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee, 10 April 1939, box 8, folder 11, UPWA Papers, SHSW; *Midwest Daily Record*, 20 December 1938; *C.I.O. News—Packinghouse Worker Edition*, 9 January 1939; Bruce Nolan and Grant Holbrook interview; Mary and Alvin Edwards interview.

tioned by the NLRB because the workers' actions exceeded "the bounds of permissible union activity," clearly defined the contours of acceptable union conduct and the drastic penalties for breaking those rules. While the local unions retained their shop floor militancy in the 1940s and 1950s, they took great care to stay at least formally within the limits of the law.⁵³

Nonetheless, the capacity of the union to organize Swift workers and hold on after a disastrous defeat vindicated the rank-and-file organizing strategy of union pioneers and their decision to work with the CIO. Sioux City workers recognized that the alliance of packinghouse workers employed by different companies and living in different cities allowed the PWOC to continue the struggle for union recognition in the Swift plant. The PWOC's perseverance after the strike and its successes at other plants showed Sioux City's packinghouse workers that the new industrial union was not going to disappear after one defeat and abandon its members, as the Amalgamated had in 1922 and 1935. Its tenacity solidified the coalition of Sioux City's Russians, Poles, Lithuanians, blacks, and other packinghouse workers in the new labor organization. Bonds of mutual class interest, forged through common shop floor action against company domination, held even after a serious setback, and proved strong enough to overcome the resistance of the packing firms.

Looking back on their gains, workers lauded the accomplishments of the unions they created. "They give him some kind of rights without being afraid he's gonna get fired," said Sam Davis. "That's the reason why I'll always be a union man." For Bruce Nolan, "The biggest satisfaction I got was the things we thought was possible when we organized, and seeing in big part all of those dreams come true." To Jennie Shuck, the unions were more—a liberating force for her oppressed community. "You know the Russian people, under the Czar, were downtrodden," she pointed out. "These people joined and paid their dues because they truly believed in solidarity." Reflecting on her

53. *Decision Order and Direction of Election*, Cases C-1116 and R-1125, 21 NLRB 1181; Loren Callendar interview, 1 July 1986, UPWAOHP; Sam Davis interview; Grant Holbrook interview. In 1943 the PWOC received an international union charter from the CIO and became the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA).

past, Shuck reiterated the need for collective action and admonished a young generation to join unions, fifty years after supporting Ballard and the CIO. "Get involved, because in numbers there is strength. If you're trying to fight a battle by yourself, it's almost impossible."⁵⁴

54. Sam Davis interview; Bruce Nolan and Grant Holbrook interview; Jennie Shuck interviews.

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