

Striking Images: Photographs of Iowa Packinghouse Labor Conflict, 1948–1960

EMILY KATHRYN MORGAN

MEATPACKING has long been a major Iowa industry. Archives in the state are replete with information about the industry, and many authors have documented its history and impact in the state.¹

Research for this article was supported by a State Historical Society of Iowa Research Grant.

1. For general histories of labor relations within the meatpacking industry in the Midwest, including Iowa, see Bruce R. Fehn, "Ruin or Renewal: The United Packinghouse Workers of America and the 1948 Meatpacking Strike in Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 56 (1997), 349–78; Roger Horowitz, "'It Wasn't a Time to Compromise': The Unionization of Sioux City's Packinghouses, 1937–1942," *Annals of Iowa* 50 (1989), 241–68; Shelton Stromquist and Marvin Bergman, eds., *Unionizing the Jungles: Labor and Community in the Twentieth-Century Meatpacking Industry* (Iowa City, 1997); Wilson J. Warren, *Struggling with "Iowa's Pride": Labor Relations, Unionism, and Politics in the Rural Midwest Since 1877* (Iowa City, 2000); idem, *Tied to the Great Packing Machine: The Midwest and Meatpacking* (Iowa City, 2007); and Gregory Zieren, "'If You're Union, You Stick Together': Cedar Rapids Packinghouse Workers in the CIO," *Palimpsest* 76 (1995), 30–38. For discussions of gender in the industry, see Dennis A. Deslippe, "'We Had an Awful Time with Our Women': Iowa's United Packinghouse Workers of America, 1945–75," *Journal of Women's History* 5 (1993), 10–32; Bruce R. Fehn, "Striking Women: Gender, Race, and Class in the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA), 1938–1968" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1991); idem, "'Chickens Come Home to Roost': Industrial Reorganization, Seniority, and Gender Conflict in the United Packinghouse Workers of America, 1956–1966," *Labor History* 34 (1993), 324–41; and Roger Horowitz, "'Where Men Will Not Work': Gender, Power, Space, and the Sexual Division of Labor in America's Meatpacking Industry, 1890–1990," *Technology and Culture* 38 (1997), 187–213. For discussions of race relations in the industry, including in the United Packinghouse Workers' Association (UPWA), see Bruce R. Fehn, "'The Only Hope

THE ANNALS OF IOWA 76 (Spring 2018). © State Historical Society of Iowa, 2018.

The visual history of meatpacking, however, has received less attention. Thousands of photographs in Iowa archives are largely unstudied. Though often treated as auxiliary to and less authoritative than the written record, photographs act as dynamic social forces, not just recording but shaping events. This article examines two bodies of photographs related to the meatpacking industry, one amassed by members of a meatpacking workers' union, the other by a meatpacking company. Made between 1948 and 1960, the photographs depict contentious, large-scale strikes. This article looks at images from these two caches and compares them with press coverage of the strikes, demonstrating that both labor and management used photographs not only for passive purposes of record-keeping but also for active purposes: identification, intimidation, and retaliation. During times of conflict the camera became not simply a tool but a weapon, wielded by both sides.

The first group of photographs comes from the archive of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) Local P-3 in Cedar Rapids, now held in the Special Collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City.² This archive incorporates records from the UFCW as well as earlier iterations of the union. All of the photographs included in this article date from 1948 to 1960, when the union was known as the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) Local 3.

Of the unions affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the UPWA was one of the most outspoken and progressive in its politics. From its inception, the UPWA took racial equality as a fundament of its platform, recognizing that meatpacking's highly diverse workforce meant that any union aiming to establish a strong collective bargaining position had to adopt an inclusive stance.³ The UPWA remained a dominant

We Had': United Packinghouse Workers Local 46 and the Struggle for Racial Equality in Waterloo, Iowa, 1948-1960," *Annals of Iowa* 54 (1995), 185-216; and Roger Horowitz, "Negro and White, Unite and Fight!" *A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking, 1930-1990* (Urbana, IL, 1998).

2. United Food and Commercial Workers International Union Local P-3 Records, Iowa Labor Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.

3. See Horowitz, "Negro and White, Unite and Fight!" esp. 1-4, 162-63, and 192-233. See also Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904-1954* (Urbana, IL, 1997); and Fehn, "'The Only Hope We Had.'"

meatpacking union until the late 1960s, when industry reorganization drove it to join first with other meat industry unions and later with unions from other commercial industries to become the UFCW.

Amassed over time at the headquarters of Local P-3, the photographs in the UFCW archive overall offer a wide-ranging, multifaceted vision of union activity. Union members took some of the pictures themselves and collected others from outside sources, such as by ordering copies of news images from local papers. The UFCW pictures make it possible to reconstruct a sense of the day-to-day texture of union culture. More important, however, photographs created or collected by union members, for union members, made a significant, active contribution to the formation of a sense of community and shared identity within the organization. This proved particularly important during periods of conflict between labor and management, including lengthy, large-scale strikes, when the ties that bound union members could be tested by economic, social, and familial pressures. At such times of crisis, some photographs helped unions maintain solidarity among members, enabling them to envision community as a concrete and representable entity. Other pictures served to define community in the negative, allowing union members to identify those they believed to be working against union interests — strikebreakers and company managers, for instance, or union members who elected to “scab” by going back to work before the strike had ended. Some pictures came to play an almost weaponized role, assisting in and exacerbating intimidation of scabs and strikebreakers.

The second group of images comes from the archive of meatpacking company Farmstead Foods, formerly T. M. Sinclair and Company and Wilson and Company, now held at the Brucemore Historic Site in Cedar Rapids.⁴ More narrowly focused, the image

4. The Brucemore Historic Site in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, encompasses historical collections and a historic house and grounds. Collections relate to the personal and business lives of the owners of the house. Built by meatpacking entrepreneur T. M. Sinclair, the house later came into the possession of the Douglas family (founders of Quaker Oats). A Douglas daughter then married entrepreneur Howard Hall, whose business ventures are also reflected in the Brucemore collections. The meatpacking company T. M. Sinclair and Co. later became Wilson and Company, then still later Farmstead Foods. When the latter closed for good in 1990, the Brucemore site received a donation of documents and pho-

selection examined here concentrates on a single labor-management conflict, a strike in 1959–1960. For management, photos could be critical tools, helping company executives study a strike from a distance, understand its scope, and form an overall image of it without experiencing it directly – offering a sort of top-down vision of labor conflict, an extension of their top-down vision of day-to-day plant operations. Photographs permitted company executives to identify major players in a strike, to comprehend what was happening and who was present on the picket lines: to form a vision of the overall operations of the strike and the place of individual strikers within it, just as they had a vision of the plant itself and of the place of workers in it during normal operations. Pictures also served as justification for post-strike retaliatory action by the company, helping management determine who had played a particularly active role in the strike and potentially rationalizing the company's refusal to rehire some workers.

The two archives differ in their fundamental characteristics. As Allan Sekula has written, "Archives are not neutral: they embody the power inherent in accumulation, collection and hoarding. . . . Photographic archives by their very structure maintain a hidden connection between knowledge and power."⁵ They also maintain and extend the power relationships of those who created or compiled them. Company-created archives, for instance, tend toward unity and linearity. A well-run company controls its master narrative, presenting itself as a unified entity with a single voice. Photographs are often commissioned for official purposes, put to uses that the company as a holistic entity supports, and which in turn will advance the company's long-term strategies and goals – publicity pictures, for instance. Also, companies often employ or contract with professional photographers to take and process pictures for them, lending the photographic materials a relatively uniform quality. Overall, photographs amassed into company archives tend to uphold and advance the image that

tographs. More material came into the collection after the destruction of the former T. M. Sinclair building from flooding in 2008. See www.brucemore.org.

5. Allan Sekula, "Reading an Archive: Photography Between Labour and Capital," in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (London and New York, 2003), 446–47, reprinted from Patricia Holland, Jo Spence, and Simon Watney, eds., *Photography/Politics Two* (London, 1986).

the company has of itself and that it wishes to project into the public sphere.⁶

The archives of organizations such as labor unions, on the other hand, reflect their more democratic nature. Without an official photographer in its employ, a union local depends on individual members to document its activities. Whether an event – from a Christmas party at the local’s headquarters to a strike – appears in photographs depends on the presence of individual members who possess cameras and a desire to depict what they see. Some events may go entirely undocumented in pictures while others receive ample documentation by multiple photographers. Preservation of materials similarly may depend on the goodwill and organizational skills of individual members. Union members may have circulated these photographs as physical objects, different possessors using them for different purposes or to various ends. The egalitarian nature of a labor union comes through in the visual and material culture it produces, myriad voices and points of view coming together into a collective.⁷

6. Of course, company archives are not guaranteed to be complete. A corporation, even a well-organized one, does not retain every photograph it ever used or every document it ever created. Survival of materials may be haphazard, and organization may be as well. Photographs may not be retained in a manner that permits one to reconstruct how or by whom the pictures were made or to what end they might have been used. The company archive examined here, that of the Sinclair/Wilson/Farmstead Foods plant in Cedar Rapids, emerged from the disastrous 2008 flood of the city in an extremely fragmentary state. That even a single group of photographs and some minimal accompanying documentation survived the disaster collected and intact is remarkable. Still, even a fragmentary company archive retains, among its fragments, a singularity of purpose.

7. The nature of the archive as both concept and institution has been the subject of considerable study. As Jacques Derrida and others have pointed out, the very existence of an archive connotes some degree of enfranchisement or representation as part of an acceptable, officially sanctioned history. As such, one might argue that because both packinghouse companies and packinghouse labor unions have deposited archives in some repository or other, both receive equal representation in the historic record. But organizational systems within the archive matter equally. Derrida writes of “consignation,” which refers not only to “the act of assigning residence [of objects, artifacts and documents to an archive] . . . so as to put into reserve,” but also to “the act of *consigning* through *gathering together signs*,” which “aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or a synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration” (italics in the original). Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, 1996), 3–4. If those signs all, or mostly all, tend to point in one direction – as I am arguing that they do in a company archive – then what has

FEW PEOPLE any more really believe that an individual photograph can tell a complete and absolute truth.⁸ There are myriad ways to make a photograph illustrate a partial truth, offer a biased vision, or tell an outright lie: even aside from retouching and other forms of overt manipulation, selective framing or carefully chosen camera angles may eliminate key details, limiting or altering the viewer's understanding of what a photograph depicts. Uses of a photograph shift over time and at the will of the user, too. A photograph made to commemorate an event may later become, in the hands of others, evidence of who participated in the event. Context matters, as well: a photograph in a union-run newspaper, for instance, would be contextualized quite differently than a similar image in a community newspaper or the newsletter of a meatpacking industry organization.

Many theorists of photography have written of the camera's tendency to serve as a tool for maintaining and extending existing power structures. Susan Sontag famously regarded the camera not only as a metaphor for the gun but as a weapon in its own right, nearly as dangerous as a pistol in its capacity to turn human beings into objects. She saw photography as a key tool of Western-style capitalist expansion, a way of imaging and knowing the world specifically so that it could be conquered, controlled, and organized.⁹ John Tagg, too, has discussed photography's capacity to serve the purposes of power and governance: the way it has become integral to the endeavor of cataloguing and classifying prisoners, for instance, or any other population of human beings to be regulated.¹⁰

been preserved in the archive is not only a group of objects, documents, and artifacts but also some vestige of the meaning they originally carried, the end toward which they were originally put. The archive of a multivocal entity—a community organization, a labor union, etc.—will, similarly, retain multivocality as one of its fundamental features but potentially at the expense of “the unity of an ideal configuration.”

8. Many writers have challenged the notion of photography as an absolutely truthful medium. By far the most influential has been Susan Sontag. See especially *On Photography* (New York, 1977).

9. Sontag, *On Photography*.

10. John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Basingstoke, 1988); idem, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (Minneapolis, 2009).

A more focused body of scholarship concentrates on the uses of visual imagery in the service of American corporate interests. Much of this, however, focuses on public relations, on corporations' attempts to shape and control public image and the uses of pictures in service of that goal.¹¹ Almost no attention has been paid to the use of photographs by corporations specifically in the service of labor relations.

Likewise, the use of photographs by workers themselves is an underexamined avenue of exploration, the literature consisting of a relatively few studies. Leah Ollman's *Camera as Weapon: Worker Photography between the Wars* focuses on imagery created by German workers in the 1920s and '30s. An exhibition catalog, Ollman's book was among the first to look at photography by laborers and to place it specifically in the context of the mass-media publications in which much of it appeared.¹²

In a 1992 article about the uses of photography by laborers and management at the Pullman Company, Larry Peterson illuminates how both the corporation and its employees deployed photographic imagery in the service of their sometimes competing interests. The corporation attempted to use photography to control its public image and build (what it saw as) community among its workers; workers themselves photographed strikes, parades, picnics, and various other activities. Peterson points out, crucially, that while photographs made by the corporation and by laborers appear stylistically similar—"objective" and "realist"—laborers' photographic production tends to present workers as subjects. Corporate photographs of workers, on the other hand, present them as objects to be manipulated, much as machinery and other tools are manipulated.¹³

11. See, for example, two works by Roland Marchand: *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley, CA, 1986); and *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley, CA, 1990). A number of studies focus on specific corporations: see, for example, David Nye, *Image Worlds: Corporate Identities at General Electric* (Cambridge, MA, 1985).

12. Leah Ollman, *Camera as Weapon: Worker Photography between the Wars* (San Diego, 1991).

13. Larry Peterson, "Producing Visual Traditions among Workers: The Uses of Photography at Pullman," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 42 (Fall 1992), 55.

One extensive examination of photography and labor relations, Carol Quirke's *Eyes on Labor: News Photography and America's Working Class*, concentrates specifically on the representation of labor conflict in the American popular press, particularly newspapers and *Life* magazine. Quirke finds that while individual laborers sometimes received heroizing (albeit anonymous) treatment, American popular media tended to depict labor conflict itself as disruptive, only rarely addressing the underlying reasons why workers might feel compelled to strike in the first place.¹⁴ Quirke notes that labor unions' house publications treated union activity far more sympathetically, as one might expect, but since their circulation was much smaller and tended to be restricted to union members themselves, their impact was comparatively minimal.¹⁵

THIS ARTICLE focuses on photographs related to two major meatpacking industry strikes, one in 1948 and the other in 1959–60. The 1948 strike involved members of the United Packinghouse Workers Association (UPWA) in meatpacking plants nationwide, including many in the Midwest. Of 65 plants nationwide in which workers went on strike, 15 were in Iowa. The strike began in March, partially as a means of pressuring meatpacking company managers into raising wages and partially over dissatisfaction with the restriction of labor unions' power enacted under the Taft-Hartley (Labor-Management Relations) Act of 1947.¹⁶ The conflict quickly grew contentious. Tensions rose particularly

14. Carol Quirke, *Eyes on Labor: News Photography and America's Working Class* (New York, 2012), esp. 5 and 64–65.

15. *Ibid.*, 47–48.

16. Fehn, "Ruin or Renewal," 349, 357. Roger Horowitz writes that the Taft-Hartley Act "restricted the ability of labor organizations to exercise power at the point of production. It banned secondary boycotts and sympathy strikes, permitted the federal government to impose mandatory sixty-day strike delays, and made unions subject to severe financial penalties for defying the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] or engaging in a series of newly defined unfair labor practices. In addition to these constraints, the act required union officials to file affidavits stating that they were not Communist Party members, and made access to the certification machinery of the NLRB contingent upon compliance with these new rules of behavior." Horowitz, *Negro and White, Unite and Fight!* 181.

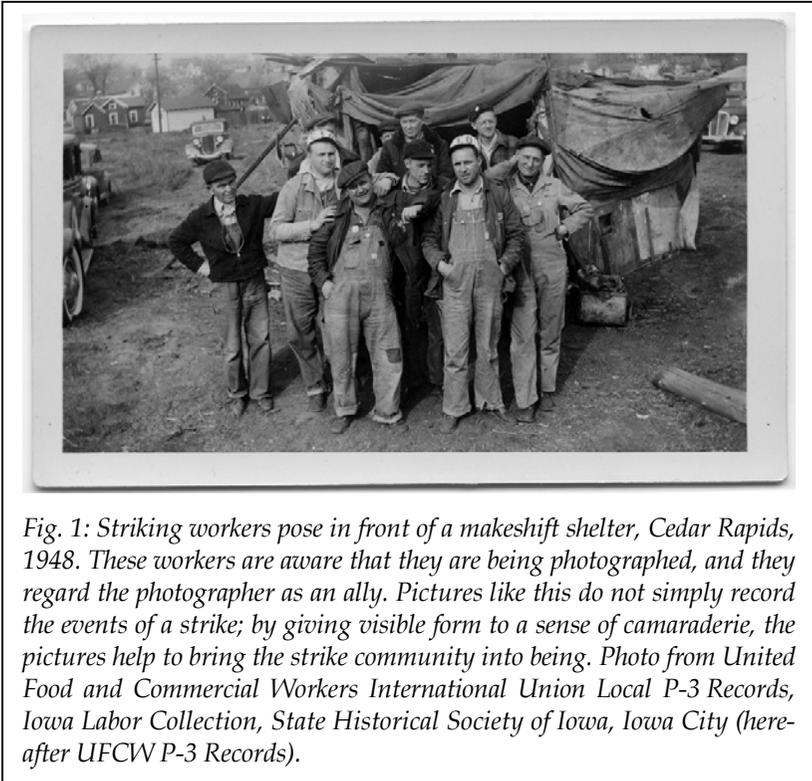


Fig. 1: Striking workers pose in front of a makeshift shelter, Cedar Rapids, 1948. These workers are aware that they are being photographed, and they regard the photographer as an ally. Pictures like this do not simply record the events of a strike; by giving visible form to a sense of camaraderie, the pictures help to bring the strike community into being. Photo from United Food and Commercial Workers International Union Local P-3 Records, Iowa Labor Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City (hereafter UFCW P-3 Records).

sharply in Waterloo, home of the Rath Meatpacking Company, and in Cedar Rapids, where the local Wilson and Company plant was encouraged by its parent company in Chicago to maintain a hard line against strikers.

Within the first two months of the 1948 strike, both the Rath plant in Waterloo and Wilson in Cedar Rapids began hiring strikebreakers to staff the plants and keep them running. Some of the strikebreakers were brought in on hired buses; some were driven into the plants by plant executives or shop-floor managers; and some drove into the plants in their own cars. However they entered the plants, they often crossed through picket lines, coming into direct contact with striking workers in the process. Strikers sometimes surrounded the vehicles, hemming them in, banging on them, taunting the inhabitants or entreating them not to take jobs as “scabs.” Such encounters occasionally grew violent.



Fig. 2: Picketers from UPWA Local 3 pose in front of strike headquarters, Cedar Rapids, 1948. By posing for photographs such as this one, the participants declare themselves as proud, active members of the strike community. Photo from UFCW P-3 Records.

One strikebreaker in Waterloo, encountering intimidation as he tried to drive into the plant, fired a weapon, killing a striking UPWA member and sparking a riot. In the short term, UPWA members received just a modest raise, but the union ultimately found its bargaining power strengthened by the strike, as the meatpacking industry came to recognize the desirability in subsequent negotiations of bargaining with labor rather than risking another strike.¹⁷

Whereas the 1948 strike had been among UPWA members industry-wide, the 1959–60 strike involved only UPWA members at Wilson and Company plants. Most meatpacking companies, following the longstanding practice of “pattern bargaining,” had managed to settle a contract with their workers in 1959 that was much the same across the industry, but Wilson declined to go along, and bargaining stalled. After UPWA members in the Wilson plant in Albert Lea, Minnesota, walked off their jobs in protest over mandatory overtime, among other grievances, UPWA

17. Fehn, “Ruin or Renewal,” 349–68; Horowitz, “Negro and White, Unite and Fight!” 176, 187–94.

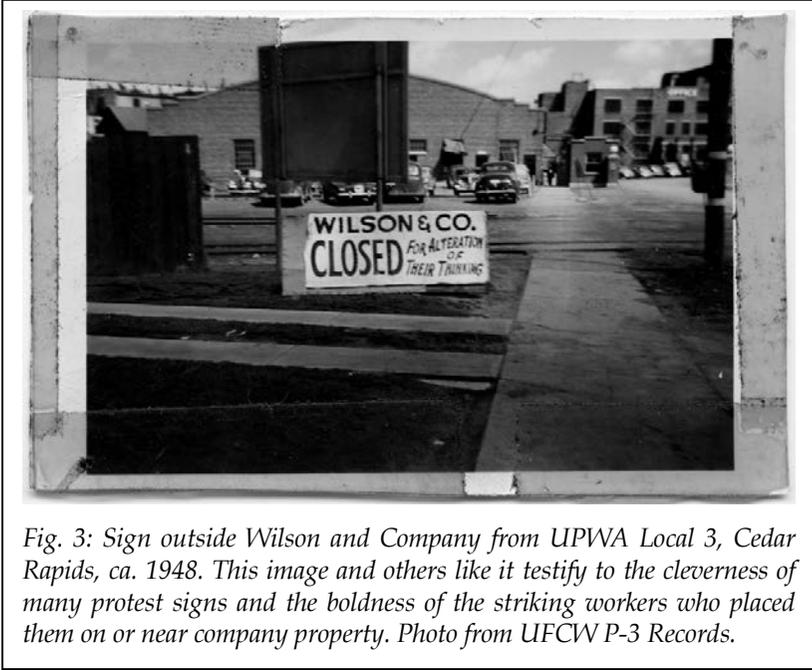


Fig. 3: Sign outside Wilson and Company from UPWA Local 3, Cedar Rapids, ca. 1948. This image and others like it testify to the cleverness of many protest signs and the boldness of the striking workers who placed them on or near company property. Photo from UFCW P-3 Records.

members in other Wilson packinghouses followed suit. The strike was extraordinarily contentious, and incidents of violence and intimidation became commonplace. Wilson gained a reputation among packinghouse workers as “the most hostile adversary the UPWA ever encountered in its twenty-five-year-existence.” The company refused to bend to workers’ demands and issued threatening memos to strikers that came to be called “Dear John” letters.¹⁸ At strike’s end, the company conceded little, though workers did retain the right to resume the same jobs at the same level of seniority as they had held prior to the conflict.¹⁹

18. Cheri Register, *Packinghouse Daughter: A Memoir* (St. Paul, MN, 2000), 163–64. Register discusses the 1959–60 strike at various points in her book, but see especially pages 154–226 for discussion of the underlying issues of the strike as it unfolded in Albert Lea.

19. “Board Sends Wilson Scabs to Bottom of List; Rules Over 3,000 Strikers Go Back on Jobs,” *Packinghouse Worker*, March 1960, 1, 3–4. See also Register, *Packinghouse Daughter*, 226. As Rick Fantasia has noted in *Cultures of Solidarity* (Berkeley, CA, 1988), 184–85, a challenge to union seniority would have been a challenge to the very existence of the union itself, a move even Wilson was unlikely to undertake.



Fig. 4: UPWA Local 3 picketers and patrol wagon, Cedar Rapids, 1948. Attached to a horse-drawn wagon, the signs become these workers' mobile testament to the perceived stinginess of packinghouse management: "Wilson's wages prevents us from even buying gas." Photo from UFCW P-3 Records.

The archive of UFCW Local P-3 at the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City retains photographs from several labor conflicts, most in Cedar Rapids, with a few from nearby Waterloo. Many of these images derive from the industry-wide 1948 strike; others are from the 1959–60 strike affecting only Wilson employees. Where available, information about the photographs' acquisition and provenance—the source and history of the images—has been written on the archival sleeves that now house the pictures. For some pictures this information is augmented by writing directly on the images themselves. One may also glean a great deal of information simply by analyzing the pictures, which can sometimes tell their own stories independent of other documentation. The majority of the pictures were made by members of the union, but some appear to have been collected from outside sources. A few were either requested or purchased from local newspapers.

True to the democratic nature of the union as a whole, pictures in the UFCW Local P-3 archive serve multiple purposes and speak in myriad voices. Many commemorate their subjects' proud,

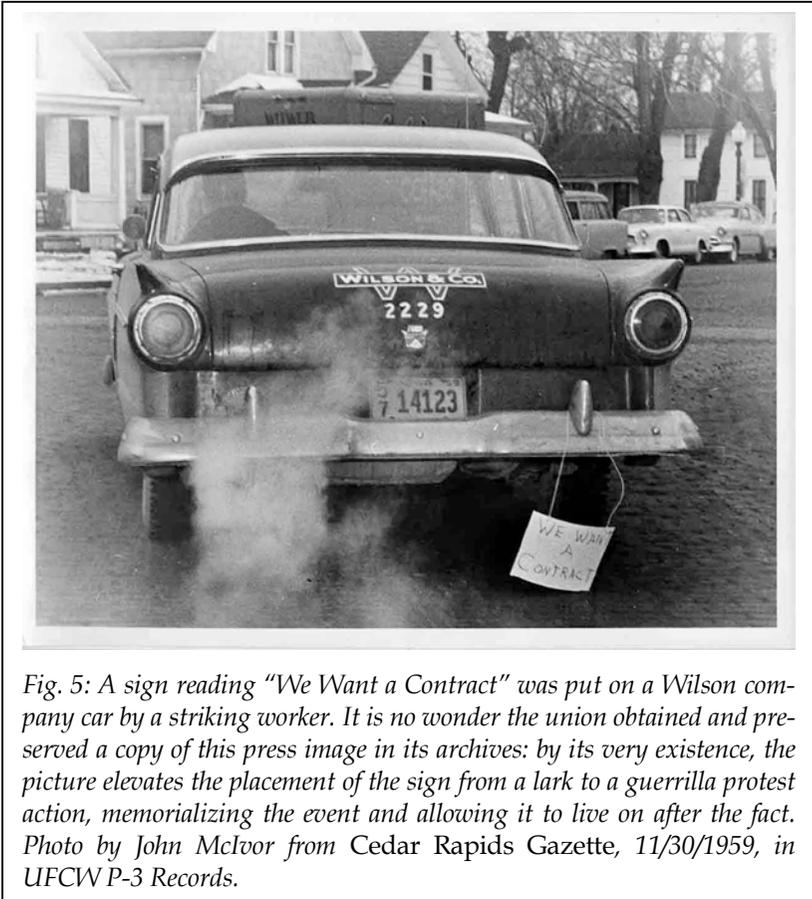


Fig. 5: A sign reading “We Want a Contract” was put on a Wilson company car by a striking worker. It is no wonder the union obtained and preserved a copy of this press image in its archives: by its very existence, the picture elevates the placement of the sign from a lark to a guerrilla protest action, memorializing the event and allowing it to live on after the fact. Photo by John McIvor from Cedar Rapids Gazette, 11/30/1959, in UFCW P-3 Records.

open participation in strike activities such as picketing and leafleting. In a series from the 1948 conflict, groups of striking workers in Cedar Rapids face and pose for the camera (see, e.g., figs. 1, 2). The subjects know they are being photographed and have had time to arrange and prepare themselves to be depicted by someone they clearly see as a friend and ally. Some pose in front of the Local, others outside of makeshift picket shelters erected near the packinghouse. Their willingness to be photographed speaks not only to a desire to remember the strike but also to declare their participation in it, to see themselves and to be seen by others as active members of the strike community. As Rick Fantasia has noted, the structure and routine of strike activities—the

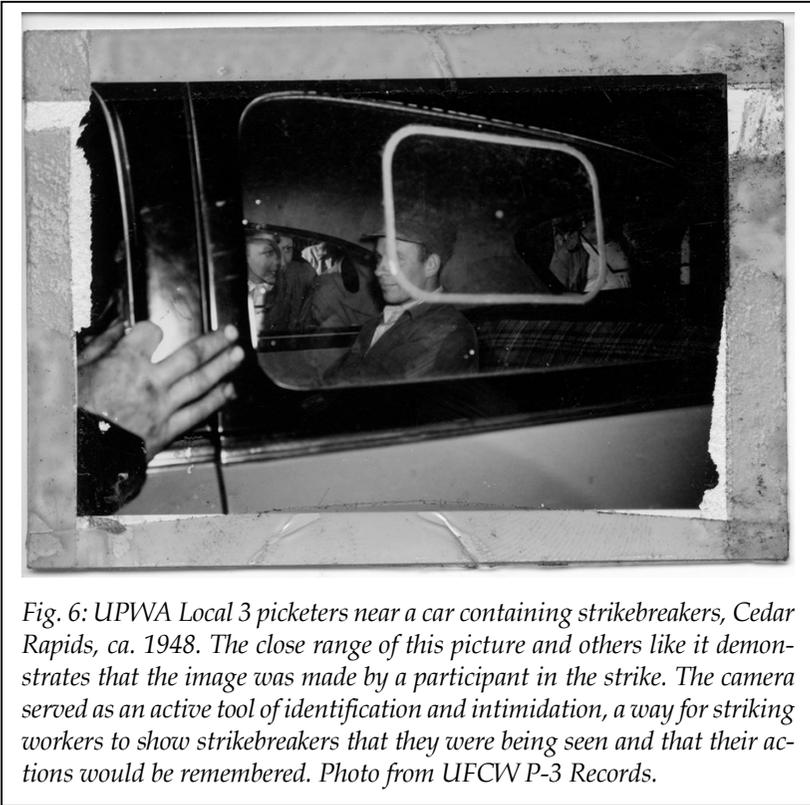


Fig. 6: UPWA Local 3 picketers near a car containing strikebreakers, Cedar Rapids, ca. 1948. The close range of this picture and others like it demonstrates that the image was made by a participant in the strike. The camera served as an active tool of identification and intimidation, a way for striking workers to show strikebreakers that they were being seen and that their actions would be remembered. Photo from UFCW P-3 Records.

scheduling of picket, kitchen, and staffing duty at the Local—replaces the structure and routine of the workday and gives the difficult strike period a much-needed sense of regularity. Collective activities provide “a sense of mutuality and sociability,” helping to engender and support “the intense sense of community nourished by the strike.”²⁰ Posed photographs of striking workers do not simply record a community spirit that already existed—they do not just passively image a worker’s preexisting identity as a loyal union member—the pictures actively create such individual and community identities, bringing them into being by giving them visible form.

Other images record the handmade signs strikers carried, wore, or posted in various locations. One depicts a sign outside

20. Fantasia, *Cultures of Solidarity*, 192–93.

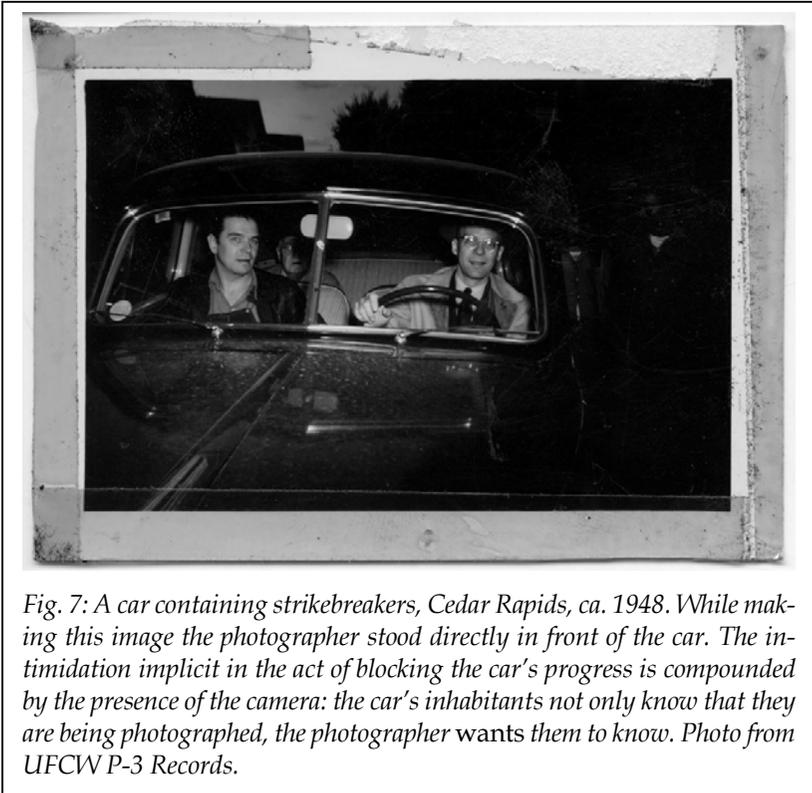


Fig. 7: A car containing strikebreakers, Cedar Rapids, ca. 1948. While making this image the photographer stood directly in front of the car. The intimidation implicit in the act of blocking the car's progress is compounded by the presence of the camera: the car's inhabitants not only know that they are being photographed, the photographer wants them to know. Photo from UFCW P-3 Records.

the Wilson plant: "Wilson & Co. CLOSED for alteration of their thinking" (fig. 3). In another, a group sits in and stands around a horse-drawn cart, the back hung with signs reading "C.I.O. #3 Patrol Wagon" and "Wilson's wages prevents us from even buying gas" (fig. 4). Here, too, photographs record the presence and wording of the signs, and also function to build community among the participants. In photographing and being photographed, union members knew they were creating a persistent document of strike actions, carrying relevance of the events beyond the immediate, testifying to future viewers and union members about the sense of community among striking workers.

Another photograph, this one from the 1959–60 Wilson and Company strike, records a kind of guerrilla action. Someone has attached a sign reading "We Want a Contract" to the bumper of a car belonging to Wilson and carrying the company's logo. The

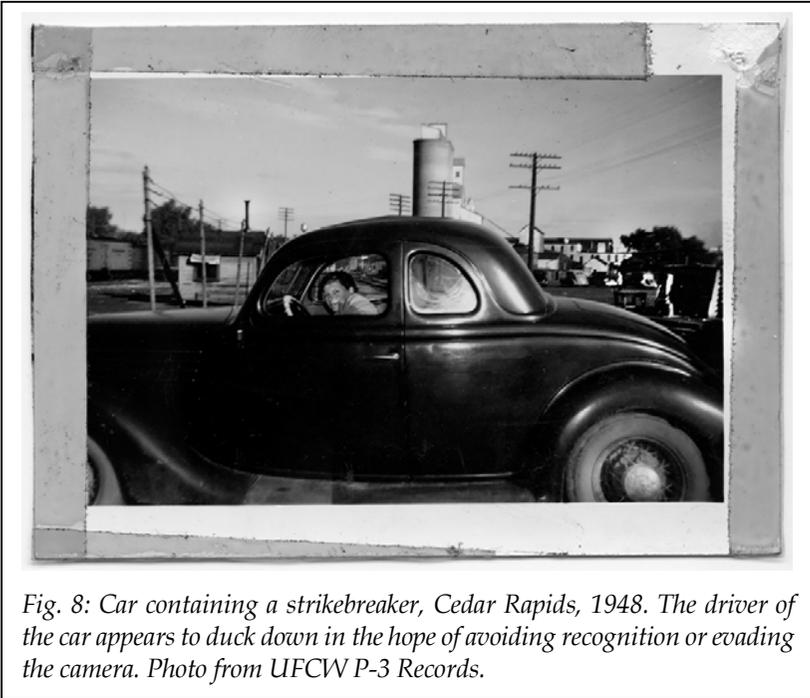


Fig. 8: Car containing a strikebreaker, Cedar Rapids, 1948. The driver of the car appears to duck down in the hope of avoiding recognition or evading the camera. Photo from UFCW P-3 Records.

unsuspecting driver carries it away with him like a “kick me” sign (fig. 5). John McIvor, photographer for the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, made the picture, which appeared in the paper in late November 1959 with the caption “Unwitting Picket.”²¹ Without the picture, the action would exist only as rumor and memory, reading as a lark and living on as a funny story. The news photographer’s picture, however, makes the event persistent, multiplying its impact. It is easy to see why union members would have wanted to collect this image and keep it at the Local’s headquarters: the picture raises the illicit sign from a juvenile hack to a protest action.

The UFCW Local P-3 archive also includes a significant number of images from the 1948 nationwide strike depicting the cars, buses, and other vehicles in which strikebreakers arrived (see, e.g., figs. 6–7). These pictures show the crowds through which the strikebreakers traveled to reach the plant, but again the images

21. John McIvor, “Activity on Wilson Picket Line,” *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 11/30/1959.

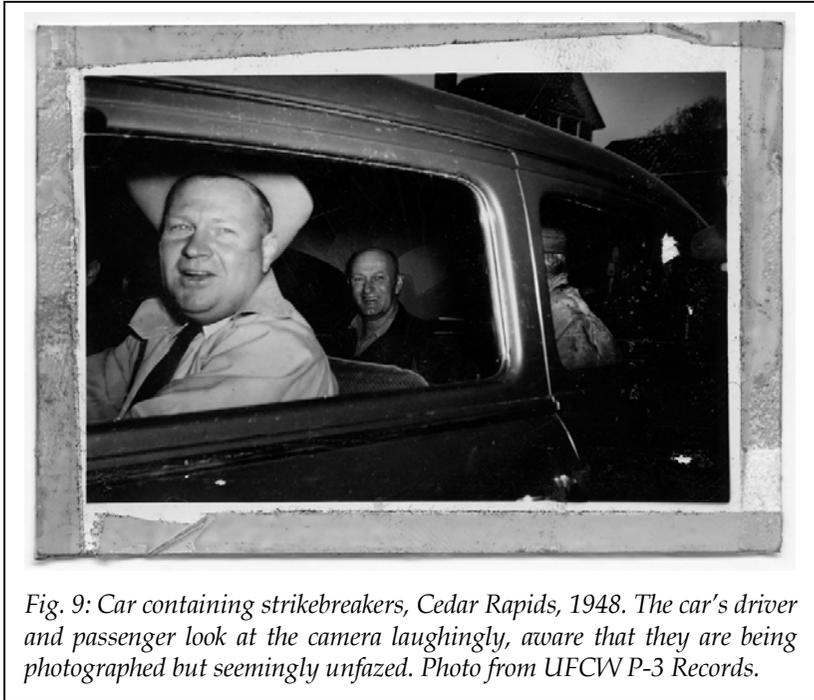


Fig. 9: Car containing strikebreakers, Cedar Rapids, 1948. The car's driver and passenger look at the camera laughingly, aware that they are being photographed but seemingly unfazed. Photo from UFCW P-3 Records.

offer more than dispassionate recording of the situation: they were made in the thick of it by participants. A newspaper reporter or other nonparticipant observer might stand back, taking a picture with a wider angle that would encompass both crowds and vehicle. The individuals who made the pictures in the UFCW archive involved themselves in the action, standing among the people crowded around strikebreakers' cars, taking pictures with narrow, concentrated fields of vision. The resulting photos were more than basic snapshots. Makers of these images aimed not to document the situation for posterity but to capture pictures of the cars themselves, and of the people inside them, with the aim of identifying those people.

Photographing the strikebreakers was not only a means to an end, not only a way of getting a picture for purposes of recognition. In this situation the camera became both a tool for creating pictures and an implement of intimidation. Simply making a picture of a person in that situation constituted a means of applying pres-

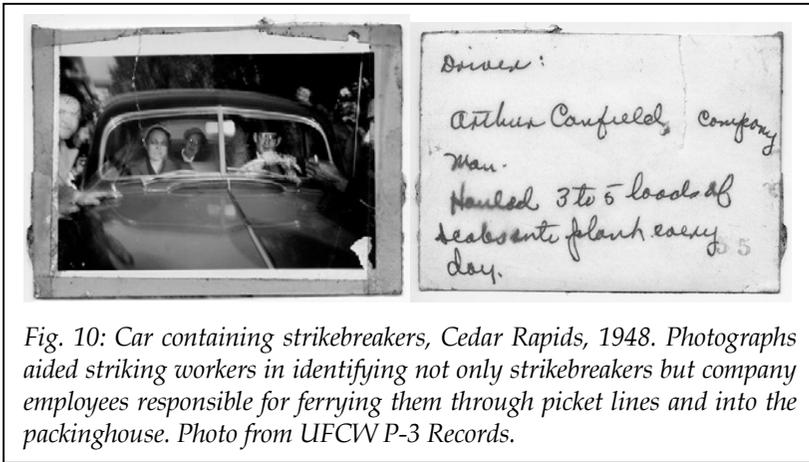


Fig. 10: Car containing strikebreakers, Cedar Rapids, 1948. Photographs aided striking workers in identifying not only strikebreakers but company employees responsible for ferrying them through picket lines and into the packinghouse. Photo from UFCW P-3 Records.

sure. By pointing the camera at the strikebreakers, the photographer let them know that they had been seen. Looking at the pictures, it is clear that the people in the cars knew this, too. In some pictures, the subjects hide their faces from both the crowds and the camera (fig. 8). Others laugh, aware that they have been viewed both by the people around them and by the lens (fig. 9).

Many of these photographs bear physical evidence of their use, indications that they were put on display and/or circulated. Virtually all still retain some tape residue around their margins, having been either taped to a board for public view or placed inside a scrapbook to be kept at the Local. Some images also have handwritten commentary or identifications on back or front. One picture includes on the back the names of three people, two women and a man, plus the words "own car." Supervisory and managerial staff, too, appear in photos made by Local 3 photographers: another image reads on the back "Driver: Arthur Canfield, Company man. Hauled 3 to 5 loads of scabs into plant every day" (fig. 10). One wonders what the strikers planned to do with this information: perhaps follow the subjects away from the picket lines and harass them? Such harassment was not unheard of: Bruce Fehn reports an incident during the 1948 strike in which a carload of Local 3 members stopped a station wagon full of strikebreakers. "The strikers," he writes, "tried to convince the potential strikebreakers not to go to the plant. When the latter said

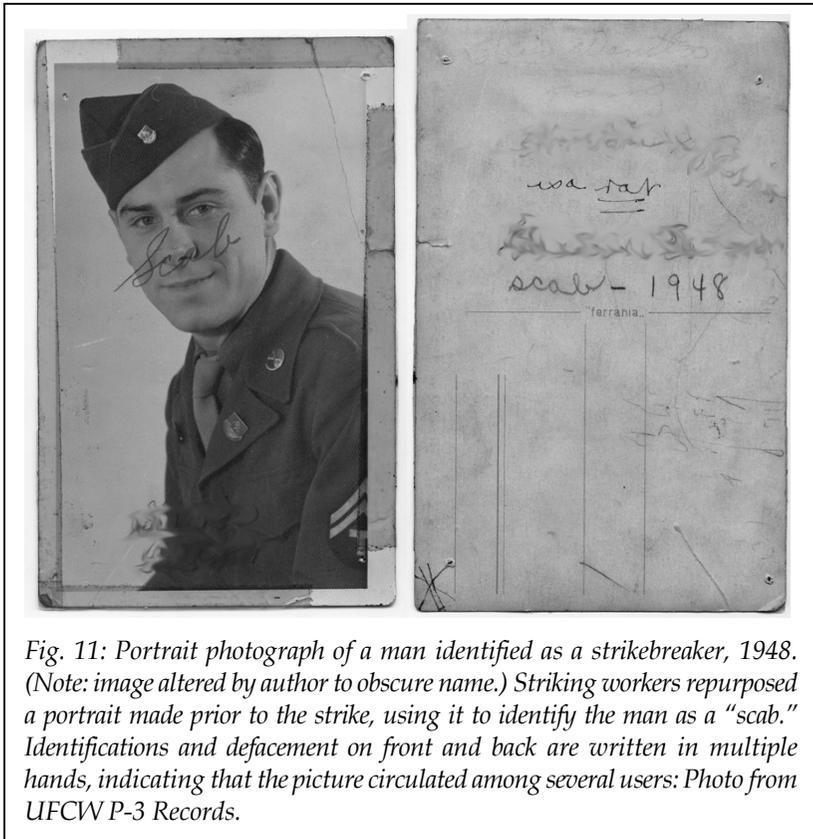


Fig. 11: Portrait photograph of a man identified as a strikebreaker, 1948. (Note: image altered by author to obscure name.) Striking workers repurposed a portrait made prior to the strike, using it to identify the man as a “scab.” Identifications and defacement on front and back are written in multiple hands, indicating that the picture circulated among several users: Photo from UFCW P-3 Records.

they were going to go on to the plant, the strikers slashed their tires.”²² Supervisors and managers, too, sometimes found striking workers at their homes when they returned from work, sparking confrontations that occasionally became violent.²³

Striking workers not only made pictures for purposes of identification and intimidation; they acquired and repurposed other photographs as well. In addition to copies of images made by local news photographers, the archive also includes a few portrait photographs and casual snapshots originally made for purposes unrelated to the strike. These pictures, too, have tape around their margins, showing that they were publicly displayed

22. Fehn, “Ruin or Renewal,” 368.

23. Wilson J. Warren, “The Heyday of the CIO in Iowa: Ottumwa’s Meatpacking Workers, 1937–1954,” *Annals of Iowa* 51 (1992), 377–80.

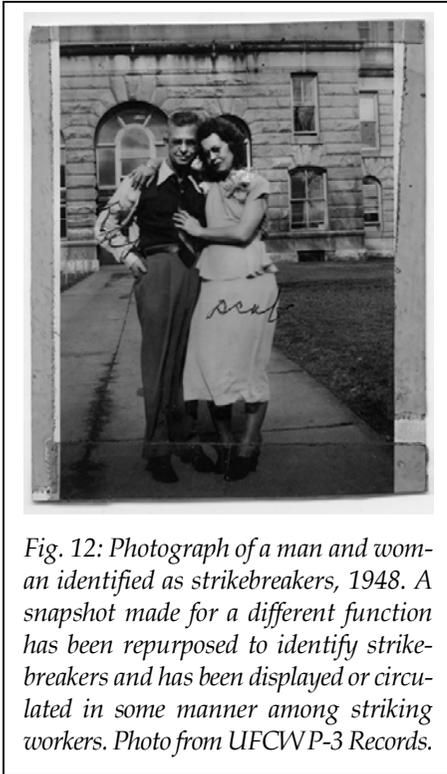


Fig. 12: Photograph of a man and woman identified as strikebreakers, 1948. A snapshot made for a different function has been repurposed to identify strikebreakers and has been displayed or circulated in some manner among striking workers. Photo from UFCWP-3 Records.

or placed in a strike scrapbook. They clearly circulated among multiple users. One studio portrait, for instance, shows a man in military uniform. His name and other defacement have been written on both back and front (fig. 11). On the front, someone has written the word *scab* across his face. On the back, beneath his name, another person with different handwriting has inscribed the words *is a rat*. A second photograph from the same group depicts a man and woman embracing (fig. 12). Someone has written taunting epithets on the images of each: the word *rat* across his arm,

and *scab* on her skirt. It seems that these pictures were on display at the Local in some fashion for an extended period of time. Various people marked them, adding identifications and commentary.

Images of strikers themselves might also be modified, should the occasion arise. Among the posed pictures of picketers from the 1948 strike, one has been "revised" by a commenter after the fact to identify a subject who later decided to return to his post before the strike was over, or otherwise expressed disloyalty to the labor cause (fig. 13). On the front of the image, a drawn bracket identifies the man as a *scab*. We might read the annotation, like the designations *scab* and *rat* written on other pictures, as simple name-calling. This particular annotation, however, also set the record straight, gesturing at something that occurred after the picture was taken. Left unaltered, the image might imply that the man remained loyal to the strikers' cause. At least one viewer

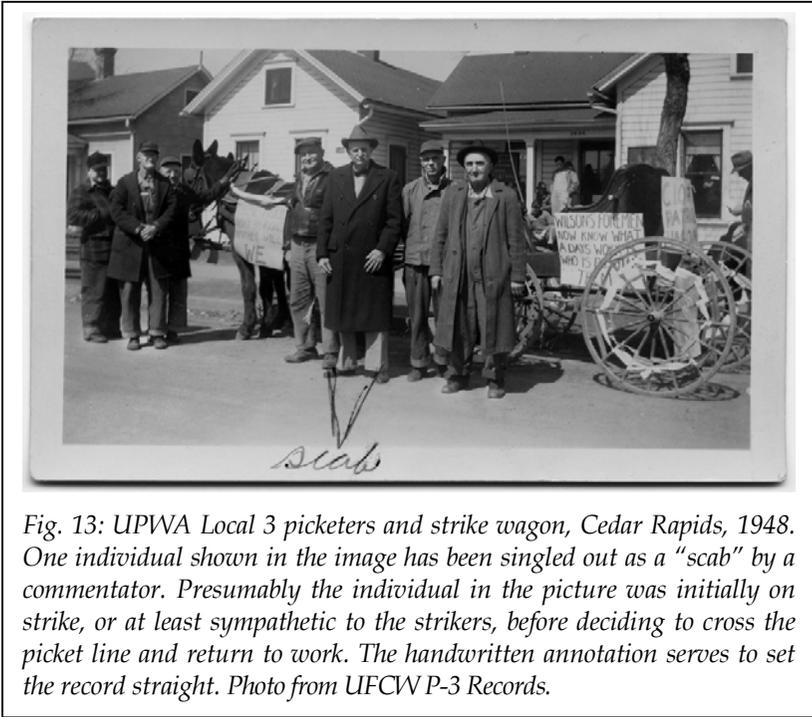


Fig. 13: UPWA Local 3 picketers and strike wagon, Cedar Rapids, 1948. One individual shown in the image has been singled out as a "scab" by a commentator. Presumably the individual in the picture was initially on strike, or at least sympathetic to the strikers, before deciding to cross the picket line and return to work. The handwritten annotation serves to set the record straight. Photo from UFCW P-3 Records.

(who also happened to have a pen handy) felt that was not the case. A great deal of emotion is bound up in this marked image: the sense of pride in labor organization that drove the creation of the picture; the potentially wrenching decision by one individual to return to work; the fury of others at the disruption of community, at what they saw as disloyalty both to them as individuals and to the union as a whole. Initially created as part of an effort to create and maintain solidarity among people in a difficult situation, with its handwritten epithet the image elides an entire narrative into its small frame.

During the contentious strike of 1959–60, union photographers again made pictures of cars full of strikebreakers for purposes of identification and intimidation. One image, dated January 29, 1960, reads on the reverse, "Taken 10:50 a.m. Unable to get license number" (fig. 14). Another, undated but labeled "circa 1950s" on the archival sleeve, makes breathtakingly clear the use of photography to conduct a kind of pictorial warfare (fig. 15).

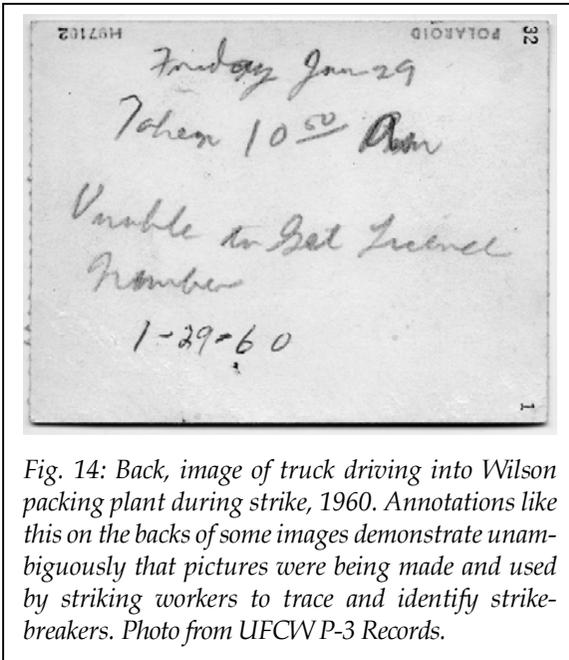


Fig. 14: Back, image of truck driving into Wilson packing plant during strike, 1960. Annotations like this on the backs of some images demonstrate unambiguously that pictures were being made and used by striking workers to trace and identify strike-breakers. Photo from UFCW P-3 Records.

The photograph depicts a female pedestrian walking past a group of strikers with her purse on one arm. Although blurred and of poor quality, the image nonetheless showed the subject's face clearly enough that users could employ it for identification. On the back, the image bears the woman's name, as well as other details supplied by various users with distinct handwriting: "Phone no. D.R. [number]. Mary (first name). Give hell." The last two words have been gone over three times – first in pencil, then again in both black and blue ink – and circled for further emphasis. Thus accentuated, "Give hell" goes from being a suggestion to an imperative.

MEATPACKING COMPANIES, too, used photography for identification and intimidation during times of labor conflict. The archive of Wilson and Company (later Farmstead Foods), housed at the Brucemore Historic Site in Cedar Rapids, includes two sets of images from late 1959 and early 1960 made during the UPWA-Wilson strike. One shows the automobiles of striking workers and their supporters participating in what appears to be a parade.

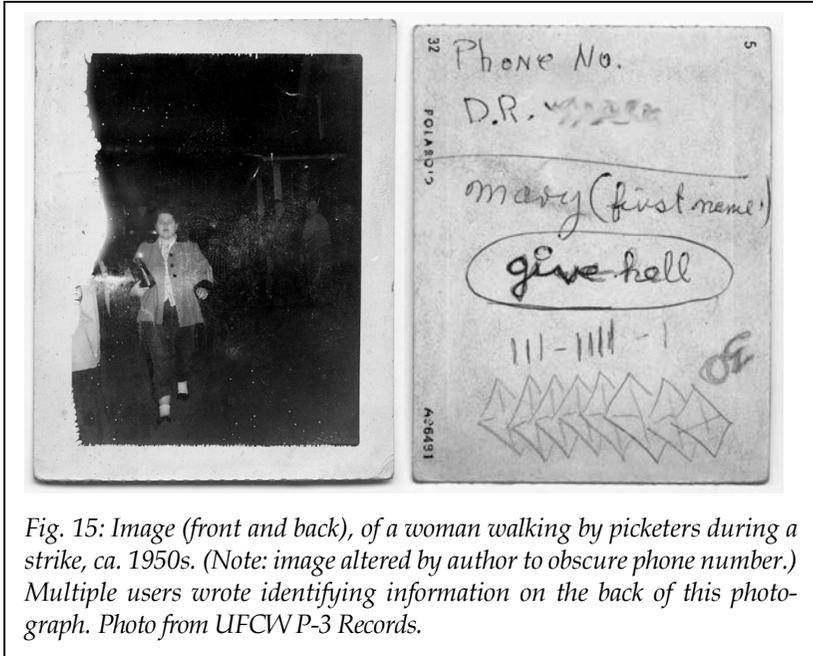


Fig. 15: Image (front and back), of a woman walking by picketers during a strike, ca. 1950s. (Note: image altered by author to obscure phone number.) Multiple users wrote identifying information on the back of this photograph. Photo from UFCW P-3 Records.

The cars carry signs with various slogans protesting Wilson and Co. and professing support for the strike. “Don’t Buy Wilson’s Products,” read a few of the signs (e.g., fig. 16). “‘Dear John’ letters didn’t fool us COCKRILL,” says another, referring to Wilson’s vice president at the time, John Cockrill, who signed the threatening letters the company sent to striking workers (fig. 17).²⁴

An interoffice memo accompanies these images. Dated November 20, 1959, and written on Wilson letterhead, the memo is addressed to a group of executives at the Chicago headquarters of Wilson and Company and signed by H. S. Amalong, the president and CEO of the Wilson plant in Cedar Rapids. It reads, “Am enclosing a number of pictures taken of automobiles participating in the UPWA parade. A similar set of pictures has been furnished Attorney V. C. Shuttleworth.”²⁵ That the company not only collected the photographs but also sent some to its attorney

24. Register, *Packinghouse Daughter*, 179.

25. Interoffice memo, H. S. Amalong to R. G. Haynie, G. B. Thorne, and J. L. Cockrill, 11/20/59, Farmstead Foods Archive, Bruce more, Cedar Rapids.

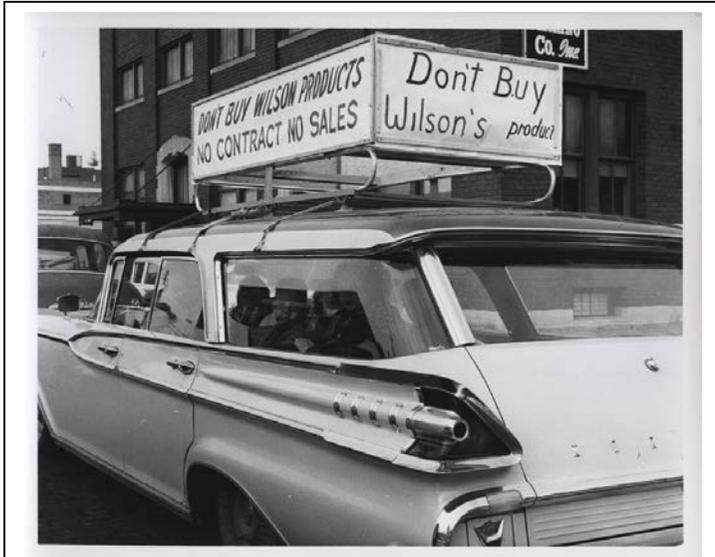


Fig. 16: Car carrying strike sign, Cedar Rapids, 1959. Collected by meatpacking company Wilson and Co., this photograph and others like it show cars participating in pro-union displays during the 1959–60 strike. Photo from Farmstead Food Collection, 1871–1990, series 5, box 7, Brucemore, Inc. Archives, Brucemore, Cedar Rapids (hereafter Farmstead Food Collection).

suggests that Wilson gathered them expressly as evidence. In part, they may have served to substantiate the company's claims in a lawsuit that it was pursuing against the UPWA for copyright infringement: the phrase "Don't Let the Wilson Label Disgrace Your Table," visible on some cars, derived directly from Wilson's official advertising slogan, "The Wilson label protects your table," and Wilson had filed a lawsuit against the UPWA to prevent its use (fig. 18).²⁶ But not every car in the photographs collected by Wilson bears this phrase or any other that might be construed as a satire of Wilson's slogan. This suggests that in collecting or commissioning the pictures, Wilson aimed to do more than just document misuse of copyrighted material. The company was gathering evidence of simple participation, potentially for purposes of retaliation against individual workers. From its

26. Register, *Packinghouse Daughter*, 177.

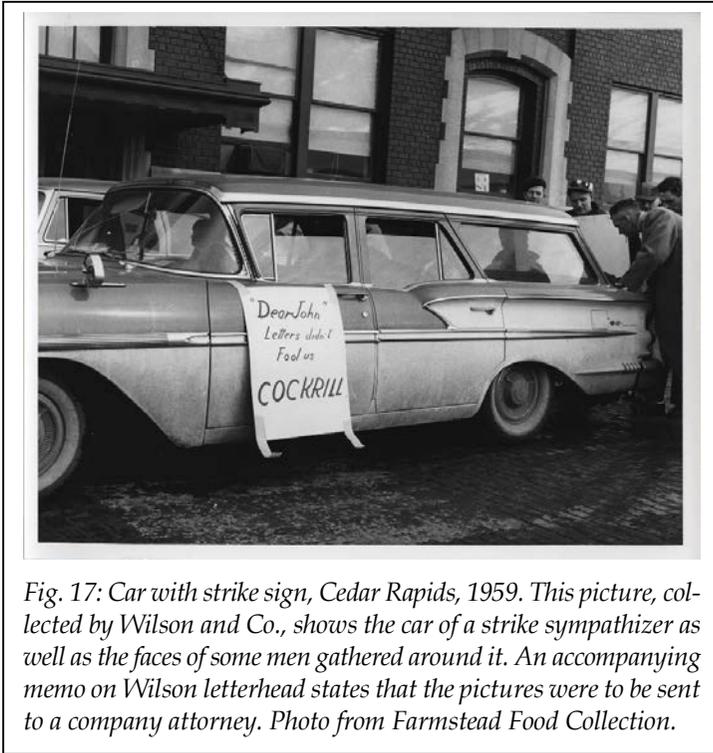


Fig. 17: Car with strike sign, Cedar Rapids, 1959. This picture, collected by Wilson and Co., shows the car of a strike sympathizer as well as the faces of some men gathered around it. An accompanying memo on Wilson letterhead states that the pictures were to be sent to a company attorney. Photo from Farmstead Food Collection.

perspective, to ride in or drive a sloganized car constituted an endeavor to undermine the company, and these photographs served as proof.

The second set of photographs in the Wilson/Farmstead Foods archive reinforces the notion that the company used photographs for purposes of identification and possibly to justify retaliation against individual strikers. Greater in number than the first set, these photographs show striking workers picketing, holding signs, and approaching cars carrying strikebreakers, among other activities. The company did not make or commission all of the images, but deliberately gathered them together as a body, purchasing or otherwise collecting them from various sources. For instance, Wilson, as the striking workers had done, acquired images from local news outlets. Indeed, the company seems to have done this much more regularly than the union: many pictures in this group have uniform, typed or mechanically printed labels on the front, listing the date of the image, sometimes the



Fig. 18: Car carrying strike sign, Cedar Rapids, 1959. Wilson and Co.'s official slogan, "The Wilson Label Protects Your Table," is satirized in the sign attached to this car. This satirical riff on the company slogan was deployed widely among UPWA members in the early days of the 1959–60 strike. Wilson later mounted a successful legal campaign against the UPWA for copyright infringement, blocking continued use of the satirized slogan. Photo from Farmstead Food Collection.

location, and the source, usually a media outlet. Some came from the *Des Moines Register*, others from the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, still others from the Cedar Rapids-based TV and radio station WMT.

The presence of press images in the company archive does not necessarily demonstrate collusion between the press and the industry; press outlets often make their images available for acquisition or purchase, and the company probably simply amassed images by requesting them from various newspapers. But the company's use of these images does shine a light on the biases of the midcentury press, which often tended to regard striking workers as forces of chaos threatening the order and prosperity brought by large corporations.²⁷ In *Eyes on Labor*,

27. See Quirke, *Eyes on Labor*, esp. 58–75.

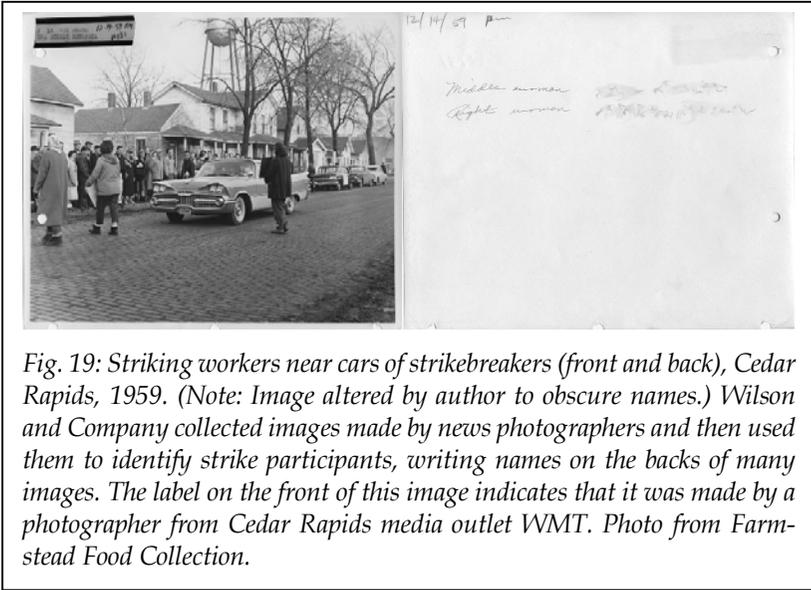


Fig. 19: Striking workers near cars of strikebreakers (front and back), Cedar Rapids, 1959. (Note: Image altered by author to obscure names.) Wilson and Company collected images made by news photographers and then used them to identify strike participants, writing names on the backs of many images. The label on the front of this image indicates that it was made by a photographer from Cedar Rapids media outlet WMT. Photo from Farmstead Food Collection.

Carol Quirke demonstrates how such media biases betray themselves in subtly—or sometimes overtly—antilabor language in newspaper stories and image captions, as well as by arrangements of images selected for layouts.²⁸ Indeed, as some of the images in the Farmstead Foods archive demonstrate, a news photographer's ideological point of view may reveal itself in the very choices—including physical point of view—made within the images themselves. Many of the pictures in this set show scenes similar to those depicted in the UPWA Local 3 photographs: striking workers picketing or surrounding the cars of strikebreakers. But, unlike the Local 3 pictures, it is clear that the press images were made by nonparticipant observers who stood apart from the action rather than inside of it. For a news photographer, the position of observer comes naturally; wide angles and distant vantage points connote neutrality and professional disinterest. But here, collected by the corporation, they also connote a passage of judgment on the activity being photographed,

28. Quirke, *Eyes on Labor*, addresses this particularly in her discussion of striking workers at the Hershey candy factory (pp. 108–48) and in her analysis of news coverage of the 1937 Memorial Day Massacre in Chicago (pp. 149–85).

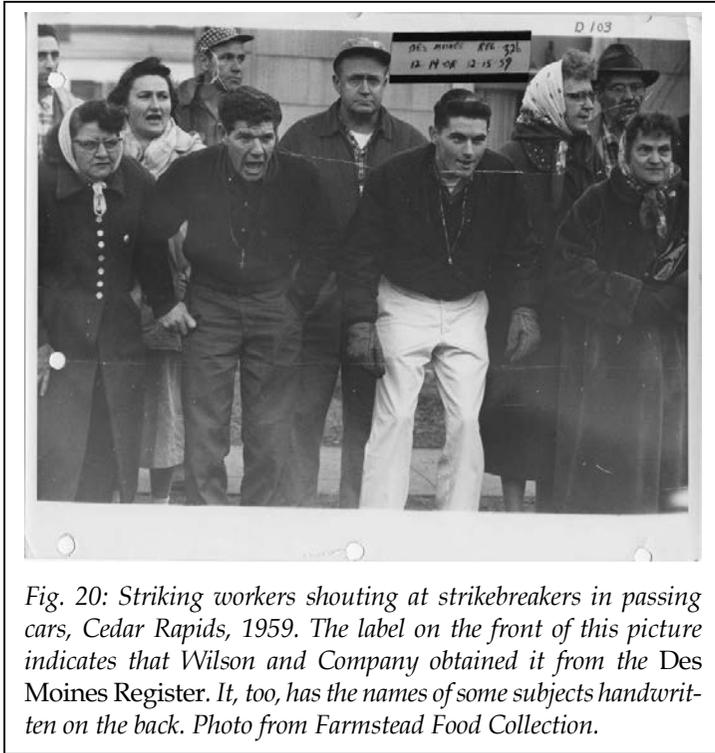


Fig. 20: Striking workers shouting at strikebreakers in passing cars, Cedar Rapids, 1959. The label on the front of this picture indicates that Wilson and Company obtained it from the Des Moines Register. It, too, has the names of some subjects handwritten on the back. Photo from Farmstead Food Collection.

a distancing of the photographer from the object depicted. The clarity of the detached, middle-distance vantage point also permitted company managers to identify as many of the striking workers as possible.²⁹

Wilson clearly did view the pictures it collected and commissioned as evidence. Names of certain picketers and sometimes also their home departments at Wilson were handwritten on the backs of many images (see fig. 19). The overall body of images serves as evidence of a photographer's malleability, the way any picture may be repurposed and recirculated. News photographers created their images to document and inform, but once

29. News photographers did not make all of the pictures in the Farmstead Foods archive: some images from the 1959–60 strike carry no labels or attribution at all. Still, the value of both types of images to Wilson's management would have been the same; company executives saw in the images what they hoped to see, the strike as an unruly and lawless activity.



Fig. 21: Striking workers looking at strikebreakers in passing cars, Cedar Rapids, 1959. Made by a photographer from the Cedar Rapids Gazette, this image shows one subject pointing a flashlight toward passing cars, presumably shining a light on the strikebreakers within. Photo from Farmstead Food Collection.

acquired by the meatpacking company, the pictures took on evidentiary value. If the participants identified in the images were later to be discharged by Wilson, or at least denied a return to their former job at the same pay and seniority scale, the photographs would become yet a third thing, offering justification for the decision.³⁰

30. Cheri Register notes that something like this happened to her own father. He stood on the picket lines for just one day, the first day of the strike. At the main gate, he exchanged greetings — “none too enthusiastically,” writes Register, but apparently not heatedly — with a management employee who subsequently turned around and left. A Wilson employee caught the exchange on movie film, and the management employee later claimed that he had been threatened at the time. Although the movie film was incapable of capturing sound, it was used as evidence of wrongdoing, and Register’s father was not permitted to return to Wilson after the strike. An arbitration board later overruled the finding, and he did eventually return to work at Wilson. See Register, *Packinghouse Daughter*, 157–58, 226–29.

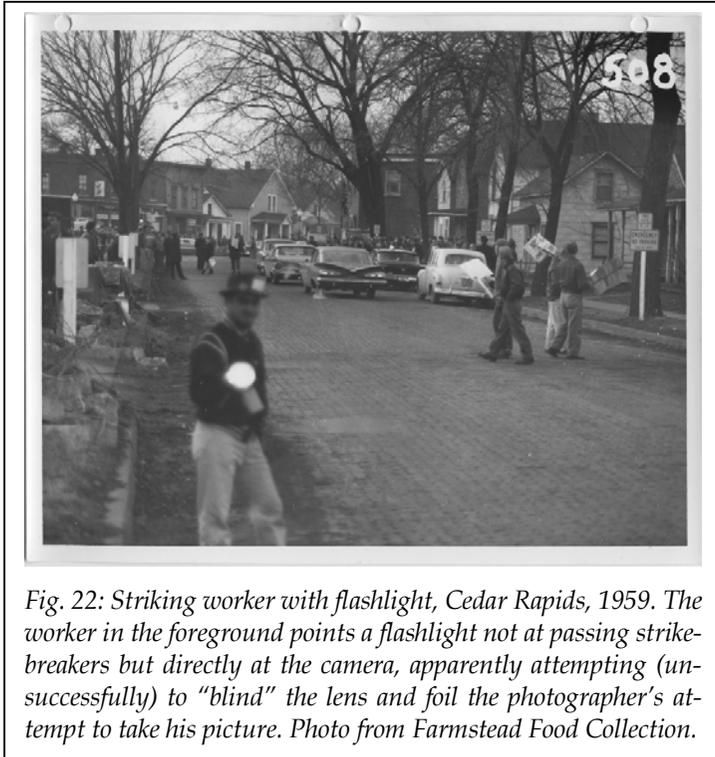


Fig. 22: Striking worker with flashlight, Cedar Rapids, 1959. The worker in the foreground points a flashlight not at passing strike-breakers but directly at the camera, apparently attempting (unsuccessfully) to "blind" the lens and foil the photographer's attempt to take his picture. Photo from Farmstead Food Collection.

In some ways, the photographs in the Wilson/Farmstead Foods archive are similar to those collected in the UPWA/UFCW Local 3 archive. Both groups used pictures for identification: just like the pictures made by UPWA members, those collected by Wilson often have names written on the back or, in a couple of instances, directly on the front. But there are also significant differences in how the two parties made and used photographs. Whereas the union used the camera itself as an instrument of intimidation, making it clear to strikebreakers that they were being photographed, Wilson and Company preferred that striking workers *not* realize the presence of the camera. The company could make its case more easily if strikers did not know that they were being photographed, since awareness of the camera might change their behavior. Whereas striking workers wielded the camera openly, the meatpacking company preferred subterfuge, or at least subtlety.

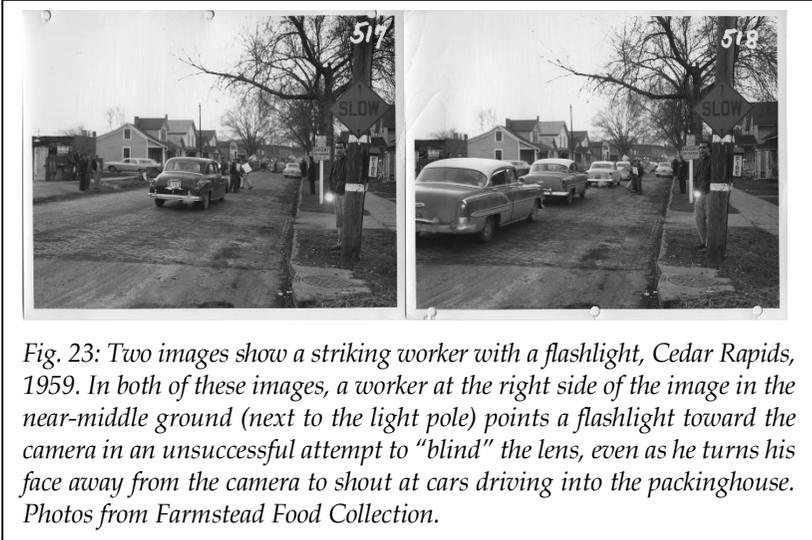


Fig. 23: Two images show a striking worker with a flashlight, Cedar Rapids, 1959. In both of these images, a worker at the right side of the image in the near-middle ground (next to the light pole) points a flashlight toward the camera in an unsuccessful attempt to “blind” the lens, even as he turns his face away from the camera to shout at cars driving into the packinghouse. Photos from Farmstead Food Collection.

Still, looking at the pictures in the Wilson/Farmstead Foods archive, it is clear that many striking workers did know they were being photographed, if not by company representatives — that is, by the enemy — then at least by newspaper reporters or by unknown parties with unknown motives. Some strikers even attempted to avoid being imaged, aware of the potential for the pictures to become evidence against them. Many striking workers carried flashlights — simply to see in the dark, of course, since the strike occurred during the winter months when dawn came late and dusk early — and also to peer into the automobiles of strikebreakers (fig. 21). But photographs indicate that they also used their flashlights deliberately to “blind” the camera by pointing the lanterns directly at the lens (fig. 22). One sequential pair of images, for instance, shows a striking worker who wields his flashlight even though it is not dark outside and keeps pointing it toward the camera even as he turns to shout at passing cars (fig. 23). This suggests that he was employing the flashlight solely in an attempt to disorient the photographer and disrupt the picture so that he could not be properly seen. As these images also demonstrate, however, the strategy did not work all that well. Only one picture in the set shows evidence of a successful “blinding” of the camera, and even then one subject remains identifiable,



Fig. 24: Striking workers at night, one with flashlight, Cedar Rapids, 1959. Here a worker with a flashlight or camera flash has successfully obscured his own face, preventing the photographer from capturing his image. Nonetheless, the face of one nearby worker remains clear enough that the company was able to identify him and to write his name on the back of the image. Photo from Farmstead Food Collection.

the back of the picture carrying his name (fig. 24).³¹ These images demonstrate that the striking workers knew photography could be used as a weapon against them, just as they were in turn wielding it in their own efforts.

LABOR UNIONS and corporations both circulated physical images among themselves for purposes of community-building, identification, and intimidation. It is also worth briefly examining how photographs were deployed in press coverage of the strikes. Various press outlets covered the 1948 and 1959–60 strikes, some allied with labor interests, others with industry, others with their home communities. Perhaps the most avid and innovative user of

31. It is possible, of course, that the flashlight strategy worked more frequently than this set of images makes it seem. Wilson may simply have discarded, or never printed, images that were ruined by subjects' use of a flashlight.

photographic imagery was the house publication of the UPWA, the *Packinghouse Worker*. Appearing in its early years in a newspaper-like format and later becoming more magazine-like, the *Packinghouse Worker* was not only forward-thinking in its deployment of photographs but also more assertive than other union publications in printing dynamic and even violent imagery of strike activity.³²

From the start of the nationwide meatpacking strike of 1948, the *Packinghouse Worker* used photographs to show how effective labor's actions had already been. On March 19, 1948, the front page showed stockyards emptied of cattle, the caption noting how the image "demonstrates the necessity of work done by the packinghouse workers and justifies their demands for fair wages."³³ For the remainder of the strike, every subsequent issue carried at least one photograph of the strike from somewhere in the United States, and many issues carried entire spreads of photographs, created or gathered from around the country.³⁴ Images and captions from the 1948 strike tended to promote a vision of striking workers as dedicated but peaceful, one caption noting that their disciplined devotion to the cause had been "the order of the day since the strike began."³⁵ When the *Packinghouse Worker* did acknowledge that violent words and actions had occurred during the conflict, it placed responsibility with packing companies and strikebreakers, not striking workers. One photograph, part of a full-page spread of strike pictures from April 16, 1948, depicted what the caption described as a "blackjack and loaded cane! . . . Armour's weapons in their attempt to break the strike of Local 73 in Fargo, North Dakota."³⁶

32. For discussion of the *Packinghouse Worker's* use of photography in general, see Quirke, *Eyes on Labor*, 48 (quoting Quirke's interview with *Packinghouse Worker* editor Les Orear); for discussion more specifically of the publication's use of strike imagery, see pp. 243 and 337–38n79.

33. "On the Picket Line: Packers Refuse Arbitration and Force UPWA Strike," *Packinghouse Worker*, 3/19/1948, 1.

34. At that point in its history, the *Packinghouse Worker* was published every two weeks.

35. "We Will Fight!" *Packinghouse Worker*, 4/2/1948, 1.

36. "Coast to Coast: Action Shots on the UPWA-CIO Strike Front," *Packinghouse Worker*, 4/16/1948, 2.

The issue of May 28, 1948, containing news of the death of a striking worker at the hand of a strikebreaker in Waterloo, incorporated on its front page a somber image of a large group of pickets and their children gathered in a half-circle around a pool of blood on the ground. Created by a photographer apparently kneeling, the image offers an impressive composition, fore- and middle ground occupied by a smear of blood and sawdust while the striking workers' families—standing as representatives for the family left behind by the dead man—loom above it and above the camera, confronting the photographer mutely.³⁷ The accompanying article offered little discussion of the immediate reason for the killing, the strikebreaker's claim that pickets surrounding his car had made him fear for his life. Instead, the text shifted blame to A. D. Donnell, executive secretary of the Rath Company, claiming that he was indirectly responsible for engendering a volatile situation in the street outside the meatpacking plant and thus for causing the chaotic melee in which the striking worker was killed.³⁸

The strike of 1959–60 was much narrower than the industry-wide 1948 strike, concentrated solely among UPWA members at plants owned by Wilson and Company. Coverage in the *Packinghouse Worker* reflected that, the later strike occupying less space in its pages. Still, the publication devoted sustained attention to the Wilson strike, covering it consistently from June 1959, when Wilson first locked out its workers at several plants, to March 1960, when arbitration agreements were put in place. Strike coverage included photographs of UPWA president Ralph Helstein standing alongside strikers at the Wilson plant in Albert Lea, Minnesota; in addition, a number of images focused on the nationwide "Don't buy Wilson" campaign that the union was waging in support of striking Wilson employees.³⁹

37. "Strike in Big 3 Over, Wilson Continues Fight: Rath and Morrell Workers Also Hold Picketlines Solid in Eleventh Week," *Packinghouse Worker*, 5/28/1948, 1.

38. Lee Simon, "Blame Company in Murder of Striking Worker," *Packinghouse Worker*, 5/28/1948, 3.

39. For the photograph of Helstein, see *Packinghouse Worker*, Dec. 1959, 4; for coverage of the "Don't Buy!" campaign, see, for example, "Don't Buy These Wilson Brands," *Packinghouse Worker*, Dec. 1959, 3; and "Passing the Word, 'Don't Buy Wilson!'" *Packinghouse Worker*, Jan. 1960, 1, 6–7.



Fig. 25: John McIvor, "Packinghouse Pickets," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 11/30/1959. This photograph, an image of striking workers looking at a strikebreaker's car, made an appearance in three widely varying contexts: in the pages of the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, McIvor's employer; in the pages of the *Packinghouse Worker*, the explicitly pro-labor house media organ of the UPWA; and among the images collected by meatpacking company Wilson and Company, where it helped the company identify striking workers. Photo from Farmstead Food Collection.

One image from this coverage, made in Cedar Rapids, is particularly interesting. The picture shows pickets surrounding a car. The accompanying caption reads, in part, "Strikers at Cedar Rapids, Ia. plant of Wilson & Co. give razzberry to car passing through the main gate."⁴⁰ The caption does not deny the seriousness of the situation, but it emphasizes that the striking workers engaged primarily in mockery and verbal, not physical, assault of managers and strikebreakers (fig. 25). What is especially noteworthy about this image is that it appeared originally not in the *Packinghouse Worker* but in a local paper, the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*. John McIvor, staff photographer at the *Gazette*, took the picture

40. *Packinghouse Worker*, Dec. 1959, 12.

at the end of November 1959. The caption in that paper read "PACKINGHOUSE PICKETS—Large numbers of pickets, including 50 from Waterloo, massed Monday morning in front of the Wilson and Co. plant's main gate. However, as shown here, they broke ranks to permit cars to enter the gate."⁴¹ Emphasis in the *Gazette*, then, lay on the picketing workers' large and enthusiastic ranks, but also on their general orderliness—a quality also emphasized in the *Packinghouse Worker* caption.

But it was not only labor interests that claimed ownership of this image. A copy of the picture, purchased from the *Gazette*, is also among those collected by Wilson and Company as evidence of their workers' participation in the strike. A single photographic image thus appeared in three separate contexts, its meaning and the messages it conveyed varying with each new placement. In the labor press, it served to show the Cedar Rapids pickets behaving exactly as the union hoped they would: giving strike-breakers a much-deserved hard time but at the same time remaining nonviolent. In the local newspaper, it functioned as news and information, showing the size of the picketing crowd and (with its caption) attesting to the group's law-abiding behavior. In the corporate collection, the picture demonstrated individual workers' participation in the strike and thus, by extension, their fundamental opposition to company interests—workers' very presence on the picket lines, not just the nature of their behavior, became suspect.

While corporations like Wilson collected strike photographs such as these for official use, companies and industry organizations were unlikely to devote any space to strike-related images in their newsletters and glossy publications. In contrast to the *Packinghouse Worker* and local news outlets, packing industry media organs printed no photographs of labor conflict at all. The *National Provisioner* was the official publication of the American Meat Institute, the meatpacking industry trade organization. Reaching an audience of independent grocers, butchers, and meatpacking plant managers and executives, the publication covered a broad range of industry-related topics in a tone as clearly pro-business as the *Packinghouse Worker* was pro-labor.

41. "Activity on Wilson Picket Line," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 11/30/1959.

Although the *National Provisioner* used photographs in its pages, the images were there to convey information or provide evidence, not to document current events.

The issue of March 6, 1948, for instance, included text coverage but no pictures of the growing conflict between the packing industry and the UPWA: the articles "CIO Union Spurns 9¢ Raise and Sets March 16 Walkout" and "Labor Politics Seen in CIO Strike Action" have no illustrations.⁴² The publication did include pictures of workers, but not as social actors; rather, workers were represented as the engines by which the work of meatpacking got done. To give just one example, a three-page story from early 1947 about a new plant owned by Capitol Beef Packing Company incorporated five images: one of equipment, the other four including human figures. In captions for the latter, the plant executives and the killing floor foreman were identified by name, but the other workers — many of them nonwhite, unlike the supervisor and executives — were referred to by their role as "boners" or simply as "workers."⁴³ Such coverage persisted in the *National Provisioner* throughout the 1950s and '60s. Union activity received (skeptical or negative) textual coverage; workers themselves appeared as objects, never as active subjects.

THE RELATIVE PAUCITY in the popular press of images of workers, made by workers, for workers, renders study of union-made and union-collected archival images of labor conflict that much more critical. The camera permits self-representation on both sides, allowing its possessors to depict themselves and thus to shape how others see them in the present and future. Companies base their advertising and publicity campaigns on this principle, of course; but individuals and organizations engaging in self-representation, even informally, enact a version of the same activity. Self-representation may serve to counter, or at least to complicate, the vision presented in representations made by others. In group snapshots made in front of strike shacks and on picket lines, for instance, union members present themselves as proud and well-organized groups of orderly demonstrators,

42. *National Provisioner*, 3/6/1948, 15, 29.

43. "Capitol's New Beef Plant in Operation," *National Provisioner*, 1/11/1947, 8-10.

caring for their own and one another's needs. This vision counters the one that appears in many other pictures, such as those residing in the Wilson/Farmstead Foods archive, which show picketers mostly when agitated. From the latter sort of image one would receive an impression of striking workers solely as angry militants. Union-made pictures show a more complete and comprehensive vision, with striking workers engaging both in confrontation and in community-building efforts. Images in packinghouse union and company archives offer a complex vision of the uses of photography, difficult to assimilate into a single narrative but certainly disruptive of any notion that photography always serves the mechanisms of power at the expense of those with less.

The images discussed in this article demonstrate the inadequacy of a unidirectional, top-down conception of photography. While many theorists have correctly pointed out photography's active role in making and shaping knowledge, not simply passively depicting the world, images from the Iowa meatpacking industry remind us that the camera may serve both sides in any battle. In the examples discussed here, both labor and management used the camera for purposes of reconnaissance, gathering information to use as a means of control, to manipulate the behavior of their opponents. Both labor and management deployed photographs for purposes of strategic intimidation. The history of the midwestern meatpacking industry is, in part, contained in these and other photographs, in individual images and also in the ways these images interact with one another, play off of and inform one another. Far from being simply a means of passive illustration, auxiliary to the written record, photography and other forms of visual culture actively create and circulate meaning. Comprehensive study of the meatpacking industry depends on the recognition of images as an integral part of any archive, and on both physical and digital preservation of these invaluable documents.

Appendix

PHOTOGRAPHS have to be separated out from surrounding materials if those materials might otherwise threaten their survival: taken out of albums made of acidic paper, for instance; or removed from non-archival mounts; or liberated from documents to which they might originally have been stapled. If care is not taken in the process of such preservation, however, the photograph's original context will be lost. An image unmoored from context does not become completely meaningless, of course; it still contains information within itself, constituting its own form of documentation. But such an unmoored image loses some of its ability to illuminate a particular event at a particular moment in time. To the extent possible, archives should be processed in a manner that preserves or at least records the original context of a photograph.

If the preservation of context is difficult in a physical archive, it becomes even more so when one encounters the archive solely in a digital state. Although digitization is a worthy endeavor and hugely helpful to researchers, it must complement rather than replace the preservation of physical objects. With regard to photographs, a great deal may be lost in digitization: context, order of presentation, format of presentation. Even an object's physical size becomes difficult to understand, when this may be key to understanding its use. Just as photographs must be archived in a manner that preserves their context, they must also be digitized in as complete and contextualized a manner as possible. Backs must be scanned as well as fronts, and the two preserved together; links must be made to other photographs in the same series (or album, or book, etc.); the original sequencing or other existing organizational scheme must be indicated.

Because photos are now often not physical objects, many of them never achieving concrete existence, this emphasis on their material properties may seem unnecessary. Photographs today may be—and routinely are—labeled and relabeled, circulated and recirculated, at will and virtually without repercussion. But the lessons about context—about circulation, about labeling and captioning, about repurposing—that we learn from physical images in physical archives, can be applied just as readily to digital imagery. Indeed, such lessons have more, not less, relevance today, when visual literacy skills have become vitally necessary to informed negotiation of the digital realm.