Rebellion and Restoration

Welfare capitalist, Endicott Johnson style, had once again proven itself, surviving depression, prohibit government policies, and a major union threat. The "Square Deal" had always been most vulnerable where it was weakest, on the shop floor, and that is where its challenges struck most effectively. Yet the concrete walls of corporate paternalism held, demonstrating a versatility that its critics learned to take seriously, if not respect. It would be wrong, nonetheless, to ignore that Endicott Johnson's paternalistic order had also suffered erosion. An ailing and bitter patriarch less willing to defend welfare against profit-hungry stockholders, a labor force more prone to work stoppages and strikes, a management less inhibited in its use of coercion and intimidation, as well as a new and important government role in labor-management relations were signs that the "Square Deal" was and would be transformed and diluted—from within and from without.

In the 1940s, a decade of war, escalating worker expectations, and militant unionism, outside forces would continue to undermine the strength of paternalism. The Depression, even though it had imposed strong pressure on labor-management relations at Endicott Johnson, had also reinforced the inward-turning, psychologically enveloping tendencies of the "Square Deal," characteristics that helped to define and deflect the assaults of "outsiders." But the social and economic realities of the 1940s opened in just the opposite direction and tended to open wider those fissures that emerged in paternalism in the previous decade. Only the coming of the cold war and the branding of paternalism's enemies as subversive and management's willingness to restore and expand retracted elements of the "Square Deal" were able to preserve welfare capitalism and Endicott Johnson's open shop.

Yes, as the January 1940 election demonstrated, the "Square Deal" had once again proven itself. But loyalty always expected a return, and this management
was lax in delivering. Feeling somewhat overconfident in “their” margin of victory over the unions, Endicott Johnson managers were slow to raise wages, redress shop floor grievances, or restore the benefits that they had promised would be forthcoming if the workers only demonstrated their loyalty. In the months following the election, wages continued to stay low, and many of the factory conditions that earned workers’ ire persisted. Workers who had voted against the unions in the hope that the Johnstons would reward their loyalty were sorely disappointed. One employee, in a letter that appeared in the local USWA paper, expressed a sentiment that seemed to be spreading among fellow laborers:

In the last campaign I was non-union, believing that the unfavorable situation that prevailed in EJ was temporary. I must admit that I was mistaken. Conditions get from bad to worse. . . . Many of my fellow workers who were promised that we would be taken care of if there was no union were invited to a measly five cents an hour raise. It was just like throwing a dog a bone. The only reason that they gave us that was because they know there was a lot of union activity in the mechanical departments and they were afraid that we non-union workers would join the union. But they can’t buy me for a lousy five cents, and I know that there are others who feel the same way.

When it became clear to workers that wage and shop improvements were not forthcoming from management, many turned to the farm. In the summer of 1940 several groups went out on strike. The lasters of the West End Victory Factory initiated a work stoppage in late July 1940. At first management faced the lasters’ exhibition of rebelliousness with confident inflexibility. But repeated work stoppages in August 1940 led to a compromise. More surprising than this act of rebellion on the part of Victory Factory lasters (who had long held a reputation for their independence and solidarity) and a more significant barometer of growing dissatisfaction with management was the show of force by the stitchers of the Victory Factory in late August 1940. On August 22 the local USWA paper, the Labor News, reported that the “entire stitching room in the West End Victory Factory quit work. This action,” the paper went on to note, “was the workers’ protest against the firing of Forelady Pearl Riley, who, temporarily, has not been working because of illness.” The workers, angry at their superintendent for Riley’s firing, were conveying a message to management; it was their right to be consulted on such names. Elsewhere, similar protests over shop conditions were taking place. Comfort Factory lasters protested the firing of fellow workers. In the Boys and Youth Factory, cutters “went to town against their foreman in a creditable show of unity.” Workers in the Sunrise Factory abandoned their machines in protest over the transfer of work to another factory. One former USWA activist who had almost been attacked by a mob of fellow women workers after the January election, recalled this very different scene at the Sunrise Factory in
the summer of 1940: "Then one day . . . I saw another mob coaxin' down. Well! I'll tell you I picked up an iron bar and thought the first one that comes near me I'm gonna kill. Because I had nobody there. My back was to the wall—I just turned my back to the wall and stood there. [Pause] They were dissatisfied with working conditions and they were walking out!" And this was just a few months later. . . . There was a walkout."7 Parachord workers struck in the fall of 1940, apparently over wages.8 The Parachord strike may well have recalled to management that it had made promises to workers that it was not fulfilling, for on November 12, 1940, the company partially restored the 5 percent wage deduction it instituted in 1938 to cover the cost of the Medical Department.9

The partial restoration of the medical deduction was not enough to put a halt to workers' discontent. In January 1941 an "epidemic of strikes" hit Endicott Johnson, affecting the Spero Leather Tinney, the Fine Welt Factory, the Scout Factory, and the Nissen' and Children's Factory.10 Yet such displays of militancy were not being channeled into a union sentiment, even though union challengers had finally established a united front.

In the weeks and months following the defeat of the BS&WU and the USWA, a consolidation of forces was effected in the Triple Cities. The BS&WU withdrew from the area, leaving only the CIO's USWA to continue organizing work. The USWA recognized that the fighting of the two unions had hardly helped matters and began to mend fences. Officers of the CIO Endicott Johnson Organizing Committee met with the former president of the BS&WU local, Emil C. Hughes, and worked out an alliance, forming a new CIO local, Local 177. Abandoned by the national leadership of the BS&WU, many of the more active members of the AFL local joined the new CIO organization.11

With the withdrawal of the BS&WU, a spirit of unity was born. The new CIO local's paper, the Labor News, noted: "There is an air of quiet optimism in CIO headquarters these days when former AFL men mingle in a friendly fashion with their CIO brothers."12 One worker wrote into the union paper: "Is it really true the two locals of the AFL and the CIO are together? It's hard to believe but it certainly warmed my heart."13 While some AFL holdouts continued to petition the BS&WU leadership to return and make a second attempt at organizing, it was all in vain. The national leadership showed little interest in expending any more of its resources on what it believed to be a losing cause.14

Although union organizers made slow progress in recruiting new members, continuing signs of worker dissatisfaction with management sustained their hopes that the showworkers would ultimately see the light and join the CIO. The Labor News took every opportunity to point out to employees their need for a strong, united labor organization through which they could bargain with management on a firm foundation than the "Square Deal" permitted. But
for the most part, Endicott Johnson workers seemed content to deal with managers without the unions, although they recognized that the presence of the USWA "encouraged" company officers to be more attentive to worker demands. Indeed, feeling the pressure of continuing union attacks and the persistence of shop floor friction, the corporation finally restored wage cuts in April and June 1941.12 In late 1941 management went even further to appease the workers. It reinstated five paid holidays and distributed lump-sum payments for the previous year's holidays.13 The USWA, naturally enough, claimed that the firm's concessions were responses to union pressure: "The Five Paid Holidays which E-J has granted to you were given only because E-J feared the union and because E-J realizes that many workers are now joining the CIO." There was a great deal of truth in their boast. But it was equally true that the coming of World War II and improved economic conditions had also made it easier for management to make such concessions.

II

Growing military expenditures and a flood of foreign orders for scarce consumer goods stimulated American industry and pulled it out of depression. Between June 1940 and the end of 1941, the number of unemployed nation-wide had fallen from eight and a half million to under four million. At Endicott Johnson sales increased by 22 percent between 1940 and 1941 and continued to remain strong throughout the war years. Reflecting the national trend, employment opportunities in the shoe firm also increased. Between 1940 and 1941 the labor force grew from an average of 17,041 to an average of 18,339. But the company was careful not to take on the additional obligations associated with hiring new workers. As it had before, the corporation hired employees on a "temporary basis" with the "understanding that when there was no longer work for them to do, they would be released." Furthermore, the firm made it clear to new workers that they were not entitled to medical services or permitted to join the Sick Relief Association.14

With the entry of the United States into war in December 1941, the firm found it increasingly difficult both to hold on to old workers and to recruit new workers to meet its production needs. By the end of 1941 labor turnover at Endicott Johnson was rapidly increasing. It would continue to do so well into 1943. Separation rates rose from an average of less than 1 percent a month in 1940 to between 4 and 5 percent a month in 1942 and 1943. During the same period the shoe industry in general experienced comparable increases (as did numerous other industries). Yet while separation rates doubled in the 1942-46 period for the industry as a whole, at Endicott Johnson they rose more than fourfold. In the early years of the war, the turnover was even more dramatic, approximating an eight- or ninefold rise.15 Not only did the firm face competition from higher-paying industries involved in war production that lured
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shoeworkers away, but with the declaration of war, military induction further depleted the company's labor force. Charles F. Johnson, Jr., noted in November 1942:

"Everything is going along as well as could be expected here, except things are tightening up a little more all the time and it is getting more difficult to take care of our customers' requirements. About 2,000 E.J. boys are already in the service and more are leaving all the time. We have also lost quite a few workers who have quit their jobs to go elsewhere to work where, at least temporarily, they can earn more money. In the total we have about 1,500 less people on the payroll now than at the beginning of the year and our production is down about 15%."

Labor shortage problems continued in plague management throughout 1942 and 1943. In a letter sent out to factory superintendents in the spring of 1943, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., emphasized that "manpower is our major problem and will continue to get more serious as the war continues." In an attempt to alleviate labor shortages, the corporation tapped membership networks, much as it had during World War I. Managers made it known to employees that relatives of theirs could easily obtain jobs in the firm, and hoped they would pass the message along.

In the Depression the workers had been dependent on the firm for relief, for work, for survival. Now, it was becoming clear that the relationship of dependency was reversed. This situation was not lost on the workers. The recollections of one cutting room foreman suggest the psychological changes that the war ushered in. He recalled an episode involving eight men in his room who were "drunk." In the previous year he was able to scare the men effectively into abstinence on the job. But the war changed all that: "I didn't have one trouble with them until the war started. And that blew the hat off. Every damn one of the eight went all to hell cause they thought the war was on and I wouldn't fire them cause I wouldn't be able to get help." The men were wrong in this case: all were replaced by cutters recruited from outside the firm. But their changed behavior, attributed by the foreman to the war's impact, probably represented a more general change in attitude taking place among the workers.

An increasing sense of power and rebelliousness was also reflected in a growing tendency of workers to join together to restrict output. Responding to speedups initiated by company managers during the late-staves years of World War II, workers banded together and agreed among themselves to limit production in order to protect their rates and present overwork. So widespread had this practice become that management felt compelled to warn the workers against "stitching":

"Limiting work to a minimum amount, (commonly called "stitching"), is fundamentally wrong and could prove extremely harmful to the workers..."
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and to the business. Straight piecework gives every man and woman not only a right—but we think it entirely best that they do all they are willing and able to do, when there is plenty of work. This note is intended to encourage you and urge you to do exactly that.11 Throughout the firm, workers grew more stubborn and unwilling to accept the fees of management. The same foreman who had to contend with rebellious “drunkards” soon faced obstinate cutters unwilling to cut leather on which they could not “make their rates.” He was forced to accept their refusal and look elsewhere for cutters willing to cut the leather.12

The war not only affected the attitudes of the workers, it also introduced institutional structures that provided workers with opportunities to bypass the firm’s traditional and informal arbitration procedures. By the end of the “Square Deal,” while it is true that, since the creation of the NLRL and the encouragement of collective bargaining by the federal government, Endicott Johnson employees had been provided with such opportunities, the war gave them greater access to machinery with which their grievances could be aired and acted upon. The National War Labor Board (NWLB), created in 1942 by executive order and designed to minimize strikes and work stoppages by providing an arbitration mechanism for both formally and informally organized workers, threatened to replace the individual and committee appeals to company supervisors. Shop floor committees had been utilized by the firm’s employers in former decades and had preserved personal links between managers and workers. The NWLB, however, through related and subordinate Labor Department agencies such as the United States Conciliation Service, provided Endicott Johnson workers alternatives to direct bargaining with managers. Various groups of workers, both with and without union encouragement, took advantage of these alternatives to resolve disputes over wages in the 1940s. Management felt secure in the knowledge that the shoe workers had rejected unionization, the willingness of various groups of workers to call upon government agencies to intervene in labor disputes must have given company officials reason to doubt their security. Since the “Little Steel Formulas” of September 1942, when wage increases were limited by the NWLB and exceptions could only be granted by appeal to the board, the volume of requests for wage increases grew tremendously. Appeals from Endicott Johnson employees who had been unable to obtain satisfactory wage adjustments from management made their way through the bureaucracy of the federal government, generally being resolved by the United States Conciliation Service under instruction by the NWLB.13 In January 1943 a dozen “Toongee v Vamp” operators in the West End Victory Factory quit work and demanded an increase in their base pay. The workers, dissatisfied with offers made by management, sought out a lawyer and took their case to the United States Conciliation Service. The government arbitrator
finally reached a compromise settlement in September of that year. Similar appeals to the Conciliation Service were made by Security and Fair Play Factory lasters, by Scout Factory heel scourers, by Boys and Youth and Pioneer Factory stitchers, by Fine Welt Factory edge stitchers, by West End Victory "stitched edge" operators and vampsers, by Challenge Factory Good-year stitchers, and by Victory Factory cutters. In some cases, as with the lasters of the Security and Fair Play factories, appeals to the Conciliation Service were made with union encouragement and legal support. Thus, new government bureaucracies undermined the "Square Deal" by offering alternatives to workers. Lawyers and federal investigators constituted threatening intermediaries in what had previously been "family" affairs. And yet the most serious threat to corporate paternalism remained the unions, as subsequent events would demonstrate.

III

Some time in 1948 a strategic decision was made by the USWA's and its trade union ally, the International Fur and Leather Workers Union (IFLWU), of the CIO, that unionization attempts should be concentrated on certain divisions of the corporation and not on the firm as a whole, in particular on divisions that had formerly proven themselves to be somewhat sympathetic to the idea of unionization. The IFLWU, one of the more radical of the CIO unions and headed by strong and popular communist leadership, soon stepped in and began organizing in the Endicott tanneries and adjacent maintenance departments, while the USWA continued its work among the rubber- and shoe-workers in Binghamton and Johnson City.

The IFLWU initiated its drive by contacting Endicott Johnson workers who were formerly employed in various Pennsylvania tanneries and who had been active in union campaigns in the past, men whom it believed would form an effective nucleus of organizers. Those in whom the IFLWU placed its hopes, men like John O'Green, Elmer Baches, and Leo Gleason, all skilled rollers and loyal unionists, would indeed prove to be successful organizers.

The initial organizing work at Endicott Johnson was under the direction of Myer Klig, a Russian-born Canadian organizer who had a good track record in unionizing open shops. Klig ran a careful and methodical campaign, taking on the tanneries one by one, department by department. Additional organizers were brought in from Pennsylvania to help with the work and to ensure that every tannery worker was approached.

As had been the case in former unionizing attempts, the corporation's management conducted a vigorous campaign against the union. Threats were exchanged on both sides, and occasional fist fights broke out in the shops. According to Klig, "Many workers were intimidated and openly threatened by foremen and company stooges. The Company violated every provision of
the National Labor Relations Act." But unionists were quite willing and able to fight intimidation with intimidation, as the superintendent of the Sole Leather Tannery recalled:

There was a lot of meetings of the workers along with some of the so-called union people. . . And then we would hold meetings after hours with some of the workers. I recall this one. . . . It was about seven-thirty in the evening. It was dark. I came back from the Upper Leather barnhouse, back to my dressing room in the Sole Leather, changed my clothes and started out. This guy hollered at me, but he was in the dark.

So I went back, and he said, "I consider you a friend of mine, and I want to tell you this. They're gonna get you." "Cause I was against the union.

And I said, "That doesn't scare me. I don't know why, but it doesn't." And I was threatened. Despite the threats, violence, and intimidation that marked the organizing campaign of the union—on both sides—workers flocked into the newly formed Endicott Leather Workers Union, Local 285 of the IFLWU. After approximately a year of organizing tannery and maintenance workers in Endicott, the union had managed to obtain signed pledge cards from 1,600 of the approximately 2,200 workers employed in its targeted departments, although only 330 of these represented initiated, paying members.35

Facing the prospect of a union victory, management appealed to the NLRB to dismiss the proposed bargaining unit as inappropriate since the corporation was operating an integrated manufacturing enterprise of which the tanneries and maintenance departments were an important part, inseparable from the other divisions. The bosses, however, accepted the IFLWU's arguments that the units involved comprised a "homogeneous group" and called for a union election.36

The union won the December 1942 election, but just barely. Of the 1,988 votes cast, the IFLWU received 1,037, while 951 workers voted against union representation. Military induction had been partially responsible for eroding the union's support. Many of the workers who had signed pledge cards had been drafted. Others had left for more lucrative jobs in war industry plants.37

Furthermore, some workers decided, at the last minute, that they would rather stick with the company, particularly since 1942 had been a year filled with wage increases and benefit restoration. The company seemed, to them, to be living up to the "Square Deal." Yet a majority still voted for the union, in spite of company concessions and, significantly, despite the communist affiliations of the union's leadership. As one local union officer, a practicing and devout Catholic, recalled, "They were wise enough and shy enough to keep Communists in the background."38

In 1942, of course, communists were not viewed with the same contempt as they had been in former years. When the Non-Aggression Pact between the Soviet Union and Germany was abruptly terminated by Barbarossa in June
1941 and the Russians joined the allies, it suddenly became less problematic to be affiliated with the Communist party (although party members continued not to publicize their party affiliation). It also became less difficult to ward off the attempts of red-bearers seeking to disrupt a union by pointing to the presence of communists in its leadership or among organizers. More impor-
tant, the political agenda of the union’s leadership only tangentially touched local events. IFLWU organizers, like their counterparts among the United Electrical Workers (UE), another left-wing union, were first and foremost involved in the daily routine of creating a union local; they were not primarily concerned with bringing the Bolshevik revolution to Endicott.37

By focusing on relatively homogeneous segments of the work force, almost totally male, that were concentrated in a small area in Endicott and that had developed relatively strong and independent work cultures, the IFLWU had been able to break through the walls of paternalism. The vote, however, was not overwhelmingly positive. The election had been a close one and indi-
cated that the union would need to work hard to maintain and enlarge its support if it expected to survive. The election victory was only the beginning of a struggle, not the end.

Nonetheless, the IFLWU had managed to win—no small achievement. It became the first labor organization to unionize Endicott Johnson workers successfully. And while a large majority of the tenancy workers remained skeptical of this “outside” interloper, it was slowly establishing its credibility among many of them. By May 1943, as Myer Klig noted in a report to the General Executive Board of the IFLWU, Local 285 had received initiation fees from 1,790 workers, “with the overwhelming majority of them paying dues regularly.”38

The progress made by Local 285 in its early years of existence seemed to promise a bright and expensive future. The growth in membership came hand in hand with successes in collective bargaining. In agreements negotiated with the firm in 1943 and 1944, some of which were appealing and finally decided by the NWLB, the union won for its members wage increases, job security, seniority rights, a formal job bidding procedure, an enlargement of paid vacation benefits, and a guarantee that management would consult with the union before it made drastic changes in the firm’s medical service—a poten-
tially major point since it gave the union some say in the administration of corporate welfare programs. It further obtained a maintenance-of-membership clause in its contract, a standard union security provision that the NWLB offered to unions agreeing to abide by a no-strike pledge during the war.39 To the nearly 400 members of the local who had entered employment with the firm after September 1940 and who were denied access to the firm’s relief and medical services because of their status as “temporary workers,” the union promised to continue pressuring the company to grant equal benefit rights. With the union publicizing this inequity, company officers soon realized that
the ill produced by continuing to define new workers as "temporary" employees and to deny them benefits would only add to the union's strength and perhaps even convince the unorganized shoeworkers that they needed union protection. In June 1943, therefore, the company announced that new workers who had been with the firm for at least six months could now join the Sick Relief Association. A year later, having lost as many as 5,000 workers to the military and to other firms, the corporation further announced that access to the Medical Department would no longer be denied to new employees as it had been since September 1940. While the firm never acknowledged union pressure as a factor motivating these reversals in policy, the union took credit for the corporation's restoration of benefits. Indeed, in the minds of many workers it was clear that the presence of the union was behind these and other concessions.

The growing prestige of the local through 1943 and 1944 represented the union's success in fulfilling worker expectations. Where, in the past, informal committees of workers had to confront managers directly in order to obtain concessions, a process that was limited by the small size of the groups involved, employer now challenged corporate officials with the secure knowledge that 1,600 fellow union members stood behind them. Indeed, the union's successes in 1943 and 1944 taught many workers that there were more effective ways of negotiating with management than under the regime of the "Square Deal."

It was also true, however, that, notwithstanding the union's growing credibility, the workers' allegiance to it varied considerably. For the vast majority the union represented merely another vehicle for the airing of complaints and for extracting higher wages and benefits from management. They were not transformed into staunch unionists. Workers like Sam Salvatore, for example, joined the union with a casual attitude that hardly reflected strong union convictions. He recalled his reply to a union organizer who approached him after his return from service: "They came to me and said, 'Sam, you've got to join the union.' I said, 'I don't need no union... What the heck a union's gonna do for me?' 'Oh, we're gonna get you pay, you know, we're gonna get you this and that... And besides,' he says, 'you don't have to pay nothing to get in.' 'Why not?' 'Oh, we do that for the veterans.' 'Well, I said, 'if it don't cost me nothing, put me in then.'"

For other workers, however, the union was a focus of commitment and loyalty. Some of the most active members of the local had a history of union involvement. Lee F. Springer, a mechanical department employee, for example, had been active as an organizer in Pennsylvania in the United Mine Workers. He had participated in the 1938-40 organizing drive at Endicott Johnson and served as the financial secretary of Local 42 of the BSWU. His involvement with the IFLWU, as a vice president and an executive board member of Local 285, was both predictable and natural. Similarly, Elnor
Backes, who had been fired from a tannery in Elkland, Pennsylvania, for his CIO union work in 1937, found himself once again involved in union activity and was elected chief steward of the Sole Leather Tannery. Like many of the local's officers, who had been formerly involved in unions, he brought with him from Pennsylvania a distrust of management and an equal affinity for labor organizing.43

Union activists were also drawn from second-generation Endicott Johnson workers and from long-time employees of the firm who felt betrayed by corporate officers and who believed that the “Squeeze Deal” was no longer being adhered to. For them it seemed all too clear that the Johnsons who now controlled the firm, George W. Johnson and Charles F. Johnson, Jr., were cut from a different cloth than was the firm’s now retired and ailing patriarch, George F. Johnson. The elder Johnson, they believed, had been a sincere benefactor, one who could balance his drive for profits with a genuine willingness to share some of those profits with his workers. But to the “younger” generation of Johnsons who now occupied the helm of the corporation (George W. Johnson was sixty-two and Charles F. Johnson, Jr., was fifty-five in 1942), generosity did not come naturally. It required the pressure of the union to prod them to live up to their obligations to the workers. As one second-generation Italian worker, who became quite active in the union, recalled:

He [George F. Johnson] knew what your family was doing, what your family wasn’t doing. But he was more lenient than George W. or Charlie or some of the other Johnsons. . . . He was the kind of guy that if you were to him and told him, “I can’t live this way . . . I’ll have to get out . . .,” he found a way. He’d find a different job for you, or he’d give you a raise in pay. He was that kind of a guy. He was that more generous than his son or his nephew. They were bullies, and they took a bully attitude toward you.44

Beyond the Johnsons’ failure to respond effectively to such discontent with their regime, shop floor issues and dissatisfaction with immediate supervisors encouraged workers to join the union. One Tanner, who became a union steward, felt that the greatest service the union provided him was allowing him to bid on a job he had been unfairly denied several times. “The bosses put a lot of fellows in ahead of people who were there longer,” he recalled.45 Although the corporation prided itself on its policy of internal promotions, the policy was not being applied honestly or fairly.46 Reassignment over unfair promotion decisions and job bidding procedures often precipitated shop floor reactions both before and after the union’s involvement. But under a union contract, workers were afforded a clear and concrete mechanism for resolving such disputes.47

For all of Local 285’s success in enlarging its membership, however, the union remained vulnerable. During the war it had to negotiate a fine line
between trade union militancy and a war-imposed conservatism. Communist 
ILWU organizers like John H. Russell and Oscar Obertzen, along with the 
national leadership of the union, often found themselves inhibiting the mili-
tancy of some of the workers. Throughout the war years the ILWU, in 
following both CIO and Communist party policies, adhered to a no-strike 
pledge. When the oil bingers in the Soce Leather Tannery quit work and 
forced a shutdown on August 12, 1944, for example, the union acted quickly 
to get the workers back on the job. The corporation's legal counsel, Howard 
A. Swartwood, sent a telegram to ILWU headquarters in New York City. 
Two and a half hours later, Myer Klig replied stating that the workers had been 
ordered to return to work and that they had complied. When the jack roller 
of the Upper Leather Tannery struck on October 27, 1944, in violation of the 
no-strike provisions of the contract, the union again acted swiftly. Led by a 
renegade steward, ten rollers walked off the job, ignoring the collective 
bargaining provisions of the union contract. The union responded by ordering 
the men to go back to work, but they refused. When the company demanded 
brother action on the part of the union, Rith Dunn, the local's president, 
pointed out that only three of the eleven men involved were union members 
and that the union steward who led the walkout had already been replaced. 
Dunn agreed to broader disciplinary measures, as long as they were taken 
"without discrimination because of union membership." Consistently dur-
ing the war years, ILWU organizers and national officers attempted to hold 
the line on walkout strikes. Union discipline, however, did serve to frustrate 
and alienate some workers. 

But this was not the main source of the union's vulnerability. If the union 
was not militant enough for some workers, it was also true that there was no 
other organization to which they could turn. For better or worse they were 
forced to stick with the union. More problematic was the far greater threat to the 
continuing success of the local was the decentralization of its leadership and 
membership by the high rate of labor turnover during the war. While the war 
bring many prosperous workers who had not developed an attachment to 
the firm and to the firm's managers and who had not been influenced favorably 
by the corporation's paternalism, it also stimulated many activities. Some, 
who viewed the union mainly as a vehicle for economic self-interest, 
might drift away by more attractive jobs; if better opportunities became 
available in other firms, they left the corporation and the union. And, of 
course, the draft took its toll. It was difficult to maintain strong leadership 
where workers came and went. Furthermore, periodic layoff shortages during 
the war decreased the need for tannery workers in many departments, leading 
to cuts in the tannery labor force. When this occurred, workers were trans-
ferred to the factories or to the Rubber Mill. Since lack of seniority was the 
basis of transfer decisions, and since many of the union members were recent
employees of the firm, the reduction of the tannery work force eroded union strength.

Perhaps the greatest threat to the local, however, came from the IFLWU’s identification with communism and the Communist party. Even formerly strong unionists, like the first president of the local, John P. Farrell, were capable of turning on the union if they felt that its commitment to communism superseded its commitment to unionism. Indeed, in the spring of 1944 Local 285 faced its first major anticommunist challenge, and even though it managed to survive, the events of that spring and the following summer foreboded an ill fate for the local.

IV

In April 1944 the Birmingham Press publicized that the Dies Committee had cited Ben Gold, the president of the IFLWU, and Frank R. McInnis, president of the USWA, as having close affiliations with communism and the American Communist party. The paper further charged that the unions they headed were “dominated” by communists. Six weeks later the Press began a series entitled “Turning Red in the Triple Cities,” an exposé of communist influence on local CIO unions and political organizations. The five-part series disclosed connections between USWA and IFLWU organizers and various “communist fronts” social and political groups. In response to the articles the local CIO Executive Committee issued a statement calling the series a “smear” campaign and defended the CIO’s involvement in political activities. Yet the charges of communist domination of local labor unions had an impact on some of Local 285’s members, for on the evening of June 4, 1944, at a meeting held at the Endicott American Legion post, twenty-two IFLWU members broke away from Local 285 and formed their own union, the Tanners Industrial Union, Independent (TIUI).

Led by John P. Farrell, Local 285’s first president, the movement to form an independent union apparently was undertaken by the workers themselves, without company involvement. Certainly, however, management was served by this defection from the ranks. The new union’s attorney, Paul T. German of Birmingham, warned the fledgling group that it faced the “danger of becoming company dominated despite the intention of its members” and that it would have to develop solid and active rank-and-file support to avoid such domination.

As its first meeting the TIUI adopted a formal resolution stating the aims of its members:

First, to save unionism for the workers; Second, to help in making unions safe for democracy; Third, to help keep democracy safe for unions. We shall adhere to the American principle of justice to all, we reject
the alien cry of "Death to the Capitalists"; we believe that slavery to a state capitalism is in unbearable as any other form of bondage. We did not know, when we worked to organize under the International Fur and Leather banner, that its chief object was the spreading of an alien political belief. Our desire then, and our desire now is to improve our wages and working conditions through a union controlled by ourselves. Officers of Local 285 immediately issued a response to this "treason." They claimed that the timing of the new union, coming during the course of delicate negotiations for a new contract, was deliberately intended to "cause division in the ranks of the tailoring workers." Essentially, the IFLWU viewed the new union as a company union—its officers motivated not by ideology but by power politics. It accused Farrell and other officials of the new union, who had been quite active in Local 285, of turning against the local because their attempts to control important union positions had been stilled in the past. Farrell denied these charges, claiming that it was the IFLWU's ideological politics that led to his apostasy:

My loyalty is, and always has been, to the principle of collective bargaining. To that principle, I am still absolutely loyal. When I found that the Fur and Leather Workers had different aims and objectives, I could not sit idly by and see the union which I had helped to found perverted from its original purpose and devoted to the spreading of Communism, and I could not lend my name to what I knew was a Communist Front organization.

Farrell had known that there were some communists among the leaders of the local and the international but felt that the workers could limit their influence. With time, however, his anti-communism became more virulent. He described his change of attitude to a reporter:

Within a very short time after winning the NLRB election and the installation of officers, the avalanche of Communist literature deposited on desks, chairs and window sills in the union office made one wonder if he wasn't in the headquarters of the Browne County Communist Party. . . . I am sure, after discovering the Communist control of the International, because I am gullible but egotistical enough to think I could in some way keep communism in the background, for I did not know as yet of the complete domination of the local unions by the International. But I found out to my sorrow that Communism was the main thought, word and action of the International Fur and Leather Workers Union. After being taken to lunch by Organizer Victor Hirschfeld and told by him that President Ben Gold of the International was a Communist, and that he, Victor Hirschfeld, drove an ambulance on the Communist side in Spain (some call it the Loyalist side but they don't mention loyalty to what country), and that the international board was all inclined that way, I was sore.
Farrell told the reporter that he had purposefully delayed expressing his real reasons for resigning from the presidency of Local 285 back in August 18, 1943, because he did not want to hurt the union case pending before the NWLB at the time. 49 Farrell's attempts to discredit the IFLWU and Local 285 were unsuccessful. Endicott Johnson workers had witnessed red-baiting before, in the 1938-40 union campaigns and in the years that had followed. They knew its disruptive potential. Furthermore, in 1944 Russia and the United States were still allies fighting a common foe. But perhaps most important, Local 285's success in achieving substantial improvements in wages and working conditions maintained most workers' faith in the union, at least in the pre-cold war years. Like other left-wing unions, such as the UE, the IFLWU retained the loyalty of the rank and file as long as it succeeded in satisfying bread-and-butter demands. 50 And this it did. Even the vice president of the Tanners Industrial Union, Roger T. O'Connor, a former steward in Local 285, admitted that the workers were quite happy with the IFLWU at the time: "Everything worked fine when they had the union in there. Everybody was happy." He noted that there "was nobody against the union at that time. It was against the leader—Gold. " When Farrell began to try to wean the workers away from the IFLWU by convincing them of its communist domination, he was met with incredulity. "They wouldn't, none of them, believe it." Local 285's leadership as well as numerous loyal union members taunted Farrell and the officers of the TIU. They charged them with "tryin' to break the union and to get rid of it," recalled O'Connor, "They wouldn't listen to us. We'd tell them that they was dominated by the communists. They would say, 'Well, that's a good way of puttin' it so you could get rid of the union, you know.'" 52 Clearly, the majority of the union members did not believe that they were being "dominated" by communists.

The Tanners Industrial Union persisted as a minor but short-lived irritant to Local 285. It lasted for six or seven months and then "just faded away." 53 Nonetheless, the TIU and the revelations that precipitated its rise left their legacy. Conservative community leaders, corporate officers, and noncommu- nist union members continued to keep a vigilant eye on the IFLWU local's leadership and direction. When Local 285 joined with the Local chapter of the American Youth for Democracy (AYD), the reconstituted Young Communist League, to sponsor a "teen age canteen," local civic officials and some union members maintained a secret surveillance of the ywca club's activities. 54 Sylvian F. Battista, a steward and member of the executive board of the local, recalled union members' concerns over the social organization:

They [the CIU] were recruiting young people . . . What they were trying to do was get a lot more support. . . . I remember they were trying to get them interested in what the union is for—more of an educational program . . . They had a committee set up. At first there
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was a few, not a lot, maybe fifty-sixty people. It went along for awhile.
We did decide amongst the few (of us) in secrecy that we were gonna
watch very close that they didn't bring in any of their political ideas or
anything like that. We had a couple of people there that kept an eye on it
pretty well—went to the meetings and stuff like that. But it never got to
be a big thing.45

But a watchful eye was all that union members felt the new club deserved. The
communists, they believed, could be controlled.

As a further sign of the relative weakness or the communist issue as a
disruptive force in 1944, one need only look at the progress of the USWA in
Johnson City. There, the USWA-CIO began a concerted drive to organize
the rubber divisions of the corporation. Through the summer of 1944, while the
communist associations of the IFLWU and the USWA were being publicized by
the local press, USWA petitions for an election worked their way through the
NLRB bureaucracy. Hearings were held in June in Binghamton and in
August in Washington, D.C. On August 21, 1944, the NLRB issued its final
ruling, declaring the firm's rubber divisions appropriate units for representa-
tion by the union and calling for a secret election. On September 12, 1944, an
election was held, and by a vote of 700 to 248, the USWA won the right to
represent Rubber Reclaim and Rubber Mill (Parachute) workers in Johnson
City.46 The victory that the USWA won in these plants, although not an
overwhelming one, nevertheless demonstrates that the communist issue was
not yet a major obstacle for the unions. Since the leadership of the USWA
included numerous Communist party members and sympathizers, and since
local newspapers had publicized this, the election results were a rebuff of
civic, press, and company efforts to discredit the IFLWU and the
USWA.

V

With the communist issue put to rest for the time being, both the IFLWU and
the USWA settled down to their normal union functions of adjusting shop
grievances and pressuring management for further wage and benefit
concessions. After the victory in Europe and Japan in the spring and summer
of 1945, and the subsequent relief from the constraints of war discipline, the
USWA and the IFLWU initiated new offensives. Between 1945 and 1947 the
two CIO unions grew more militant. If union leadership had kept a tight rein
on the workers during the war years, attempting to live up to the no-strike
clause, they now let loose the reins. In October 1945 a local IFLWU organizer
wrote the president of the international, Ben Gold: "Had a nice meeting—
things are going well here—we got 19 new members during the month of
October—and more to come—also had a couple of small won stoppages—
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may be more—the fellows have decided they no longer care to work with non-
union workers. I'll let you know if things get too hot to handle.

In the fall of 1946 the USWA, following the completion of contract negotia-
tions in the previous summer, began a campaign to organize the shoe fac-
tories. It set up two new locals, Local 71 and Local 72, to represent the workers in the Ideal Factories in Endicott and the Security and Security Annex factories in West Endicott. Another local was soon founded to represent Johnson City
die, machine, and foundry workers; and petitions were filed with the NLRB for an election. Endicott Johnson management once again raised the issue of appropriate units but lost its appeals to the NLRB in two decisions.

On May 10, 1946, the NLRB issued an order calling for an election at the Security and Security Annex factories. The election was held on June 30, 1946, and the union lost by a vote of 216 to 183. The USWA made numerous excuses for its loss; in particular, that management had bribed the workers with free beer and a day off and that “active canvassers” were sent in by company officers. One USWA Local 83 officer recalled the Security Factory election and explained the union’s defeat in these terms: “They had an elec-
tion in Endicott in the Security Factory and they held it on company property and they lost because the bosses lined up right on the side of the path and the sidewalks and they watched them [the workers] and they scared the shit out of the workers and they voted it down and that was the beginning of the end.”

Most probably, the election was lost for reasons suggested by this officer’s antipathy to the security: “I didn’t think it [the union] was any good. . . . You lost as much as you gained.” The union had failed to convince enough of the shoe workers that it could offer them very much. This was not surprising. Whatever wage and benefit gains the IFLWU and the USWA had made in previous years had been passed along to the shoe workers.

The defeat of the USWA in the Security election was not quite the “begin-
ing of the end” for the unions. In previous elections neither the USWA nor the IFLWU had won by overwhelming majorities. Here, the USWA had not lost by much. What is noteworthy is not the union’s failure in this election but the signs that the union had made important inroads among the firm’s shoe-
workers and that worker allegiance to the “Square Deal” had waned consider-
ably since the early 1940s. A more concerted effort might well have turned around the thirty-three votes that had cost the union its victory. In fact, in an election held at the firm’s Johnson City Foundry and Die Shop in early 1947, the USWA won. Although the Foundry and Die Shop constituted a small unit of less than 100 workers, the USWA victory demonstrated that union sentiments among the workers were very much alive in early 1947. The victory in January 1947, however, marked the last one for either the USWA or the IFLWU, for in 1941 the cold war came to the Triple Cities, and it came with a vengeance.
VI

The years immediately following World War II were years of intense labor activism throughout the country. Beginning before the termination of hostilities abroad, the number of strikes and the numbers of workers involved in strikes had risen dramatically. In 1945, 4,750 strikes involving 1.34 million workers shook the nation. In 1946 the number of strikes had increased to 4,985, the largest yearly total in American history, involving close to 4 million workers. The duration of work stoppages more than tripled during the same period, as the number of “man days” idle due to strikes jumped from 38 million in 1945 to 116 million in 1946. Confronted by such an overt show of force on the part of labor, both the government and the public began to demonstrate a growing mood of conservatism. For those the rise in union militancy demonstrated left-wing influence over the labor movement, a governing force that demanded reigning out. Furthermore, the termination of hostilities in Europe and the Pacific ushered in a new war, one that would directly cripple American trade unions for years to come. The political and military exigencies that had sustained an alliance between the Soviet Union and the United States had been eliminated in 1945. The links between trade unionism and American communism, ties that had been forged back in the Depression and even earlier, now came under severe strain. This was particularly true in Endicott and Johnson City.

John P. Farrell and the local press had planted the seeds of suspicion in 1944. Now the seeds grew. The communist issue had apparently gone away; it had merely hibernated. When the president of the USWA, Frank R. McGrath, resigned in the autumn of 1946 and charged that communist executive board members were attempting to take over the union, local Binghamton newspapers publicized his resignation with bold headlines. Through the following winter, spring, and summer of 1947, a concerted anticommunist movement gained momentum in the community.

In March 1947 John P. Farrell again surfaced and renewed his attacks on the IFLWU, issuing a sensationalized worded, self-published tabloid specifically linking the IFLWU with communism and the Soviet Union. This time his charges apparently reached a responsive audience. Union members who had tolerated the communist presence in previous years had grown more suspicious. Even the most loyal and active unionists, including some officers of the USWA and IFLWU locals, began to have their doubts about their unions’ leadership and direction. Tensions between communists and noncommunists now emerged. In one instance Local 285 members clashed over IFLWU representatives’ objections to the posting of a government-installed anti-communist notice on company bulletin boards. Sylvan P. Battista, a noncommunist union steward, recalled the event and his feelings about it.
We were out to the office, and Frank Buckingham and some of the other
guys who were opposed to their politics said they had absolutely no right
to do that because if the company wanted to pull something—what the
company? The local government sent them out [the posters]! And what
was wrong with that? Show me what’s wrong with it? If you worked in
there and I know you’re a communist and you’re trying to do something
against our company, I’ll be the first one to turn you in. . . . Of course,
—”Red” (Oscar Oberth), didn’t like it too well and Pershing [George O.
Pershing, head of IFLUWU, third district] didn’t like it. I didn’t give a
damn. I had my own mind, and they weren’t gonna change it for me."

The revival of the communist issue swept previously suspicious workers
into taking an antiunion position. Against a communist threat generated by
the local press, the government, and most of the national media, not to mention
company officers, many workers came to identify the union with outside
subversive elements. Anxiety over “foreign” or “outside” domination re-
inforced the heuristic forces that paternalism had formerly fostered and turned
partially committed union members against the union.

Even staunchly committed unionists split on the issue. While some stuck to
the last, others abandoned what they perceived to be a sinking ship. Many
union activists who had been friendly with the local’s communist members
and organizers grew less tolerant of their politics. A few, recognizing the
quickly eroding prestige of the union, tried to salvage what they could out of
the situation, as Lee E. Springer did:

Four or five people in the ternaries pulled an outlaw strike, and the heads
of the union were communist. . . . When they started to pull this strike,
there was a group of us who didn’t want to strike, and we thought that
the union was gonna blow up . . . so we got in touch with the manager of
the company, Charlie Johnson, and a few of us worked out . . . a deal.
We worked out that they would work out some sort of a pension plan and
not hold this against any of them [union members], and we would go
along with the company and help get rid of the union. “Cause we could
see which way it was going—communism dominated, or one thing or
another. . . . After you’re in something so long and you can’t see no
point in continuing, you take the best way out. You gotta preserve
yourself.”

For Springer it was not so much a personal animosity for communism that
led to his reaction but a pragmatic evaluation of its impact on the union. For
other activists the risk of continued support of the union was too high,
especially considering their (at best) ambivalent feelings about communism.
Arthur G. Jones, a Sode Leather Tanner, agreed, when requested by manage-
ment to sign an anticommunist/antiunion petition that was circulated in early
April 1947, agreed to the request: “They called us in one at a time into the
office to get us to sign against it [the union] because it was Communist...I did. I guess because it was a dead issue. Everybody else had signed when they called me....All I remember was that we come back from the war and they threw it at us that we had been fighting against this stuff and there was communists right in there.'

The petition came in the wake of a community-wide campaign, led by various civic organizations and business groups, to drive the "commies" out of the community. The IFLWU had been contemplating moving District 8 headquarters of the union to Endicott from Williamstown, Pennsylvania. The Greater Endicott Chamber of Commerce, responding to the "threat" of "communist infiltration," initiated a local anti-communist "war." The Endicott Chamber of Commerce, the Elks, the American Legion, the Endicott Lions Club, and numerous other local organizations soon joined with the Endicott Chamber of Commerce in its campaign to purge the community of the "red" menace.

Newspaper articles accused George G. Pershing, District 8 head, of being a "Blood-Red Commie, Moving in on Endicott." The Endicott Centennial Labor Union, wishing to assure any doubts about its loyalty, quickly joined in the community vandalism of the IFLWU and in April endorsed a resolution as a back an AFL attempt to organize Endicott Johnson workers. The IFLWU, increasingly isolated in the community, and finding it difficult even to secure leases for offices, soon faced a major exodus of union members. When the anti-communist drive began, the IFLWU had a membership of about 700. In a matter of weeks the union's membership dwindled.

Rather than maintain a defensive posture, both the USWA and the IFLWU went on the offensive. One worker explained a Local Leaders' Junior strike in early April as a manifestation of this, although also an act of desperation. "They saw how things were going, and they went to pull this tannery strike as a last resort. They asked everything on it." The strike, however, was a dismal failure; its organizers were fired. A more significant offensive began when the USWA and the IFLWU joined in April 1946 in a concerted drive to organize the entire Endicott Johnson work force. But even this proved futile, as the union confronted numerous obstacles.

In late April the Bainbridge Press reported that the AFL United Leather Workers Union would formally request an election in the firm's tanneries, as a challenge to the IFLWU. The AFL raiding attempt disturbed and partially undermined USWA and IFLWU efforts in the factories; yet it was ultimately a failure. No NLRB election was held, and the AFL Leather Workers Union soon left the area. While workers were turning their backs on the IFLWU, they were not grasping for a union alternative. In part this was due to Endicott Johnson's management ...

A more formidable obstacle to the union's offensive came from the firm itself. Within the context of community and press attempts to discredit both...
the IFLWU and the USWA, the corporation's own efforts proved to be quite effective in destroying the two locals. The company fought a three-front battle. First, it continued to emphasize the communists' shop floor strength. Secondly, it fought a secret war with the aid of the National Association of Manufacturers, local company employees, and hired antiunion agents to purg the work force of communists and union "agitators." Finally, it tried to win over the workers with reassurances of benefit increases—in short, corporate welfare.

The first element of the firm's strategy was carried out through anticommunist petitions and through informal conversations with workers by foremen and superintendents. At the same time, the company maintained close ties with the anticommunist/antiunion campaign being waged throughout the community. The formation of the Broome County Committee for Americanism, headed by William C. Fischer, Jr., a Johnson City lawyer and ex-FBI agent with close ties to the Johnsontown, marked an important link between the corporation and community efforts.

While the Broome County Committee for Americanism was by no means the only organization fighting communism in the community, it was an extremely active one. The committee began its work by reasserting claims of close connections between local IFLWU and USWA officers and the American Communist party. Fischer spoke before local organizations on the "menace" of communism throughout the summer of 1947 and into 1948. On May 21, 1947, he went before the Binghamton Central Labor Union, which had already declared its dissociation with communism and communist organizations. The Central Labor Union's minutes recall his appearance in this way:

President Smith introduced Mr. William Fischer who spoke on Communism. He outlined the purposes, aims and objectives of the Communist Party, and read excerpts from an article by J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI and delivered before the Un-American Committee in Washington, D.C.

Delegates were asked to submit questions. After some discussion, President Smith stated that the Central Labor Union is in accord with the idea of being alert to prevent the infiltration of Communists into the organization.

Fischer did more than merely spread his anticommunist message in the community; he was also involved in surveillance of suspected communists and collected information on individuals—in particular, union members and officials—that might be useful in discrediting them. Fischer's connections to the FBI and to the National Association of Manufacturers, through one Richard St. John, provided the corporation with additional resources with which to conduct its union-busting campaign.
Attached please note further information received from Bill Fischer in regard to a conversation he and Dick St. John had with C— G——. G—— worked for the company a good many years but about three years ago he started to work with the C.I.O. organizers and a few months later lost his job with the company. He is not a Communist. He has always been active in his church at West Endicott. He was a Deacon and a Sunday School teacher. Due to his activities with the C.I.O. organizers and the fact that Endicott business men and clergymen realize that these organizers are Communist controlled and many of them are also Communist, he was denied in the church and this weighed heavily on his mind. He believes in unionization but does not favor Communism and has now decided to give the Company for Americanism all of the inside information he can with respect to what is going on as to their activities and future plans.96

With Fischer’s gathered information, the firm began to purge its labor force of all suspected communist activists. Charles F. Johnson, Jr., inquired of Seligman about the ramifications of firing one such worker: "H—— G—— is a Communist and has been out of step with S.J. policies for many years. The reason for sending you this affidavit is to get your opinion as to whether we would be justified in firing him out. . . ."97

While the firm exploited minimal supplies to it by Fischer and his committee to rid itself of communists and union activists, it had long ago begun to make use of loyal employees in its fight against the USWA and the ILWU. Totally ignoring previous NLRB pronouncements and anticipating the final passage of the Taft-Hartley Labor Relations Act in the summer of 1947, corporate officers actively asserted their antitumoralism through shop floor surrogates. In the Rubber Mill workers attempting to establish a future claim on company favors expressed their loyalty to the firm by relaying information to management about the union.98 Other employees circulated petitions on the company’s behalf.

Down in the Rubber Mill, I helped out for two years, and, oh, there was a fellow by the name of Steve O——. He and I, we went around with papers [petitions] . . . and we worked to get it out. We went to everybody down the line, and we had them sign to throw the union out. And we finally got it [out]. . . . We done it through the company. . . . There was word come through, I think it probably came from Charlie—come on down through the line, but where it got to us.99
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Support for IFLWU and the USWA was quickly ebbing in April and May 1947. On May 15 the company announced the following to its workers:

We have heretofore served notice upon the Unions representing employees in the tannery and rubber mill bargaining units that we desire to terminate the current working agreement with such Unions, as of June 1, 1947, in accordance with the provision of the contract.

Since serving notice of termination on the two Unions, we have come into possession of evidence that predisposed neither of said Unions represent a majority of the employees in either unit, and we have notified the Unions it would be illegal for our company to recognize them as bargaining units.

The unions responded promptly. District 3 headquarters issued appeals to all locals for financial and moral support. IFLWU locals throughout the country received the following description of events in Endicott:

Our Union is under a vicious attack in Endicott, New York. The situation is extremely serious. The Endicott Johnson Corporation has refused to bargain claiming that Local 283 does not represent a majority. We have requested the NLRB to hold a new election to prove that our local does represent the majority. The Chamber of Commerce, Police Court Justices, American Legion and many fraternal organizations have joined the Endicott Johnson Corporation to attack our union. Meeting halls have been denied us. Office space and living quarters have been denied us. The CIO Shoeworkers Local is being evicted from its office. District Director George O. Penshing, Organizer Oscar Oberholt and Business Agent John Musick with eight others have been arrested for distributing leaflets and are out on bail. Three officers of the local have been fined.

Members were tricked into signing blank postcards ostensibly against communism but now revealed to be withdrawals from the union.

The USWA and the IFLWU besought their members to remain loyal and to continue to pay their dues, reminding them of the many achievements that their unions had brought about during their tenure.

In the weeks and months that followed the company's rejection of recognition by the two unions, petitions for certification were filed by the USWA and the IFLWU and were making their way through legal channels. Company officials, under advisement of legal counsel, stalled. They sought federal court injunctions delaying scheduled NLRB hearings and won them. During one such appeal for an injunction, the company "contended that it and 20,000 of its employees would be irreparably damaged if the hearing were conducted before August 23 when most of the provisions of the new Taft-Hartley Labor Law become effective." Indeed, through most of that spring the two unions were trying to arrange for a basty NLRB election before Taft-Hartley went into effect. But the Taft-Hartley Labor Relations Act was quickly winding its way through Congress. Management knew that it could only gain by stalling.
the election. Not only could it hope to win over more workers, but once section 9(b) of the act was implemented, union leaders would have to file representations with the National Labor Relations Board and be advised of the issue. Once such affidavits were filed, the companies represented in the election. In fact, in August 1947 the IFLWU withdrew its petition for an NLRB election because it recognized that “it could not qualify by filing the non-communist affidavits which were required by the Taft-Hartley Law.”

The USWA soon followed suit.

The firm had apparently won the legal battle against the union. But it also continued to wage its private war against them, utilizing Fischer, as well as several hired hands from the community and outside, to do both spiritual and physical battle against the CIO union. In December 1948 John H. Russell, an IFLWU representative and union organizer, was beaten outside of an Endicott tavern and very soon afterward was arrested on a public intoxication charge. Although local police later apologized for Russell’s arrest, it was clear to union leaders that the beating was a setup. Indeed, even here there may have been a connection to William E. Fischer. Fischer’s son revealed that his father had acted in a similar case and had made payments on behalf of the corporation to certain local individuals in “bust union heads.”

Through the next few years, the IFLWU and the USWA continued to maintain a presence in Johnson City and Endicott, forming a joint CIO Organizing Committee. Now without government “protection,” both unions nonetheless decided to continue their protracted campaign to win the hearts and minds of the shopworkers. Through the fall of 1947 and into the following year, local union members began organizing workers in numerous factories. They helped the labor scouts of the Scout Factory to obtain a settlement of a wage dispute in September 1947. They were active among the Five Welt laborers, assisting them in their fight for a wage adjustment. With the aid and encouragement of the John Organizing Committee, an independent Laborer’s Union was formed in October 1948. The IFLWU viewed the formation of this union as “vindictive proof that our workers really want to build a union they can do so without complying with the Taft-Hartley law and without using the employer-controlled NLRB.” Yet such successes were sporadic and hardly indicative of the real plight of the locals. Two months after the firm ceased to recognize the IFLWU, the membership of Local 285 had declined to about 900. By October 1947 it stood at 300. From there it continued to drop steadily. By the end of 1946 it stood at approximately 100, and in the fall of 1947 only two of the seven locals were paying dues. The plight of Local 83 of the USWA appears to have been equally dim. Membership plummeted, and only a few brave souls remained to carry on organizing work with IFLWU activists in Endicott.

By late 1948 the organizing drive in the factories was pretty much spent.
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Although Local 285 hung on for another year, mainly through the financial support of the international and other locals, it was hurting badly. Minutes of executive board meetings disclose sinking morale. In a February 7, 1949, meeting, members expressed pessimism over the local's ability to organize the plants even with the much hoped for repeal of Taft-Hartley. George Pershing's and Ben Gold's association to the American Communist party (Gold had finally publicly admitted to being a member of the party in 1948) was acknowledged as being particularly harmful to the local. Although much of the talk revolved around the Taft-Hartley Labor Relations Act, the president of the local emphasized that the problem was that the majority "think they are on top of earth—so short time—not panicked." The last report on the union was depressing indeed. On November 15, 1949, Raymond Davis, the secretary of the Endicott local, wrote to George O. Pershing: "In your letter you asked what the attitude of the workers was in regard to organization. From what we see and hear in the plants there is not much change in the workers. They wish they had a union when they get hurt but are not willing to do any work to get one. The workers are being chased on the speed up but it isn't too apparent to them that if they work and talk for a union that they can change things for themselves."

VII

Thus ended the union drives of the 1940s. Endicott Johnson's open shop was restored. But the anticommmunist hysteria of the early cold war years or the strong-armed tactics employed by corporate managers are not entirely sufficient to explain the defection of rank and file from the unions or the growing resistance of shoeworkers and tailors to union appeals. Although company officers continued to remind workers that both the IFLWU and the USWA were "communist organizations," and corporation agents, both hired and volunteer, continued to disrupt organizing efforts in the factories, the "stick" was ultimately the most effective weapon in the firm's war against the unions.

Force and intimidation, as a new generation of Johnsons were coming to realize, were hardly in keeping with the corporation's long tradition of the "Square Deal." Nor would such responses to unionization help perpetuate labor's loyalty over the long term. It was thus not surprising that company officers, even as they continued their more aggressive campaign against the unions, would also attempt to woo workers away from the unions. This, of course, management had begun to do from the moment the IFLWU won its recognition election in December 1942. When the firm passed along to the shoeworkers many of the wage increases and shop floor rights that the IFLWU and the USWA had won for their members, the corporation was cultivating worker goodwill. When, just before the Johnsons declared their intention to
cease negotiating with both unions, they announced a 15 percent wage increase. They also cut-going to their workers. The wage increase, less employees miss the point, went into effect the day after the union contracts were terminated, on June 2, 1947.126

Enfield Johnson managers, however, recognized that they would have to pay a higher price for loyalty than mere pay increases. And thus they proceeded to do. In the summer of 1948, profit sharing, in the form of bonus payments, was revived. Although the company had legally terminated its profit-sharing plan in March 1944, to avoid possible union "vested interest" claims, it now reinstated bonus payments on a purely discretionary basis.127 Alas, the firm distributed four million dollars in 1948, one million in 1949, and three million in 1950, which sustained such embellishments well into the 1950s.128 The corporation also announced to the workers its intention of adopting a formal pension plan. This had been promised to members of Local 285 to encourage them to split with the union. After holding a referendum and receiving overwhelming worker approval, the firm paid the plan's effect on January 1, 1941.129 Also in 1945, feeling that they had lost personal touch with their workers, managers initiated the practice of holding retirement dinners, gala affairs to celebrate the loyal service of long-term employees.130 And to further demonstrate goodwill to its workers, a year later the firm constructed two recreation centers at a cost of almost two million dollars. As a result of the efforts to establish a "Square Deal," the home construction for employees was also revised, after a lapse of almost a decade. In these and many other ways, corporate officers tried to persuade the workers that loyalty to the corporation was in their own best interest. The failure of the union to recover their losses in the late 1940s and 1950s attests to their success.

Management's ultimate response to the union threat, a combination of welfare capitalism, was in keeping with company tradition. Whenever the "Square Deal" was seriously disrupted, and sustaining employee loyalty became problematic, the firm's managers were under strong pressure to reassert it. The ideal of a "corporate family" was a central and powerful ideal that operated on several generations of Enfield Johnson workers and managers. Although war, volatile labor markets, federal agencies, and unions undermined it considerably in the 1940s, these very agents also imposed a disciplining influence on the corporation's management and, in the final analysis, forced the firm to memorialize corporate paternalism.

NOTES

1. Labor News, July 9, 1940.
2. Ibid., Aug. 12, 1940.
3. Ibid., Aug. 26, 1940.
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ighouse, 1933–1937," Journal of American History 66 (Dec. 1979): 586–602. They tended to be relatively skilled workers, of Anglo-Saxon ancestry, in their late twenties or early forties, and from a union background. Unfortunately, few of them were still around for me to interview, and so this observation must remain an impressionistic one based on other workers’ recollections.


30. Ibid., 548–99.


32. Katchenbocker, interview, session 1.

33. “Report by Myer Kilg.”


35. “Report by Myer Kilg.”

36. Binghamton Press, June 9, 1944; See also Sylvan P. Battista, interviews by Gerald Zahnui, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, sessions 1 and 2, July 13, 1981, and Nov. 12, 1981, tape recordings (personal possession).


38. “Report by Myer Kilg.”

39. These were only one of its achievements. See Endicott Leather Worker 1 (Apr. 1943): 1, 2; ibid. (Aug. 1943): 1, 2; Fur and Leather Worker 3 (Mar. 1943): 1, 5; ibid. (Sept. 1943): 3; Local 285 Collective Bargaining Contracts, Local 285 files, box 61, Joint Board Papers; U.S. National War Labor Board, War Labor Reports, vol. 36 (Washington, D.C., 1944), 17–22. On the NWLB and the issue of union security during World War II, see Joel Isaac Scitman, American Labor from Defense to Reconversion (Chicago, 1953), chap. 6; and Nelson Lichten- schein, Labor’s War at Home: The CIO in World War II (New York, 1952), chap. 5. The maintenance-of-membership provision did not create a closed shop since it provided new workers with a fifteen-day “escape” period in which they could select not to affiliate with the union. Once enrolled in the union, however, they had to maintain their good standing until the next contract period.


41. Sam Salvatore, interview by Gerald Zahnui, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, July 7, 1981, tape recording (personal possession); James W. Lupolo, interview by Gerald Zahnui, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, July 15, 1981, tape recording (personal possession); Battista, interviews, sessions 1 and 2; Bernard O’Connor and Roger T. O’Connor, interview by Gerald
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Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, Nov. 7, 1981, tape recording (personal possession); Raymond Davis, interview by Gerald Zahavi, Aug. 27, 1982, notes (unpub.).

42. Salvation, interview.

43. Lee F. Spingler, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, July 15, 1981, tape recording (personal possession); Backen, interview; Endicott Leather Worker 2 (Feb. 1983), 3; Davis, interview; Salvation, interview; Kaidlecker, interviews, sessions 1 and 2; O'Conner, interview; Rabinowitz, interviews, sessions 1 and 2.

44. Bactia, interview; session 1.

45. William Haight, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, May 27, 1982, tape recording (personal possession). Anger over this injustice was an important factor in convincing Haight to become a union steward.


47. Wildcat strikes still occurred when workers felt management was violating the union contract. See "Russell Heneman Case," [1943] Local 285 files, box 61, Joint Board Papers; Kaidlecker, interview, session 1.


50. Ruth Duff to Howard Swartwood, Nov. 14, 1944, box 4, ser. 1, George W. Johnson Papers. See other material in this box on the work stoppage.

51. Wildcat strikes in the industry were of very brief duration during the war years, as were strikes in USWA connected departments in Johnson City. See "Brief for Endicott Johnson," box 14, National War Labor Board, Region 2 Case Files, Labor-Management Documentation Center, M. F. Cohan Library, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. See also "Work Stoppage" reports, box 3, ser. 2, George W. Johnson Papers.

52. Binghamton Press, Apr. 15, 1944.

53. Ibid., May 31, June 1, June 2, June 4, June 5, 1944.

54. Ibid., June 5, 1944.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid. The resolution also appeared in the Binghamton Sun and the Endicott Bulletin of June 6, 1944.

57. Binghamton Press, June 7, 1944. See also Endicott Bulletin, June 7, 1944. Local 285 established a special committee to investigate the new union and its leaders. The committee questioned the integrity of the independent's officers and recommended that the TUL's officers be "brought before the Executive Board, in
answer the charges." On July 27, 1944, the board heard the charges and recommended expulsion. Not all of the officers were expelled, however. At least one was permitted to remain a member in Local 285 but was barred from holding office in the union. Endnote Leather Worker 1 (Aug., 1944): 2-3. Battista, interview, session 2. "Special Committee Report," (1944.) Local 285 files, box 61, Joint Board Papers.

59. Ibid.
60. Ibid. For another version of Farrell's transmutation, see Maurice J. Quinn, interview by Gerald Zahavi, with the assistance of Deborah D. Maxwell, June 29, 1981, tape recording (personal possession).
62. O'Connell, interview.
63. Ibid.
64. "Memorandum of Conversations regarding a CIO Sponsored Young People's Club . . .," box 4, sect. 2, George W. Johnson Papers. Other material on the club and the AYD can be found in this box. On the AYD and its origins, see Martha Isserman, Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party during the Second World War (Middletown, Conn., 1982):178-79. On the local AYD, see Binghamton Press, June 1, 1944.
65. Battista, Interview, session 2.
67. See also Albert J. Millis, Jr., "The Shoe Company of La Mancha: Endicott Johnson Corporation" (Research paper, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University. [1977], 34-35; C. Ralph Smith, The Endi-cott Johnson Corporation (New Orleans, 1999), 53-54.
69. CIO News (Shoe Workers' Edition), Oct. 22, 1945, U.S. National Labor Relations Board, Decisions and Orders of the National Labor Relations Board, vol. 67 (Washington, D.C., 1946), 1342-50; Ibid., vol. 71 (Washington, D.C., 1946), 1100-105. See also CIO News (Shoe Workers' Edition), Feb. 18, Mar. 11, 1946. The NLRB ruling reconfirmed only the Foundry and the Shop as an appropriate unit and excluded the Green Johnson City Machine Shop workers. It was nonetheless a repudiation of the company's position that called for a company-wide unit.
70. CIO News (Shoe Workers' Edition), July 1, 1946, 12.
72. Ibid. Mrs. Hanzer [pseud.] recalled her resentment of the union because of a two-week, union-issued strike during which her husband lost substantial income. In addition, she had having to pay union dues.
73. This was in spite of mid-term appeals directly to the workers not to "split up"


74. Four essential books that trace the rise and fall of these unions (from various ideological perspectives) are Max M. Kaufman, The Communist Party vs. the C.I.O.: A Study in Power Politics (New York, 1957), David J. Saporis, Communism in American Unions (New York, 1959); Bert Cochran, Labor and Communism: The Conflict That Shaped American Unions (Princeton, 1977); and Harvey A. Levinstein, Communism, Anticommunism, and the CIO (Westport, Conn., 1981). The article literature on the subject is enormous.


76. Endicott Bulletin, Mar. 17, 1948. A copy of Farrell’s "Low-Dow vs. Operation Moscow!" can be found in Local 265 files, box 61, Joint Board Papers.

77. Battista, interview, session 2. "Red" was Oscar Osterberg’s nickname. Osterberg was the head IFLWU representative in Endicott at the time. His nickname referred to the color of his hair and not to his politics, although the latter was also consistent with his nickname.

78. See Springer, interview; and Banner (pseud.), interview.

79. Springer, interview.

80. Arthur G. Jones, interview by Gerald Zahavi, June 2, 1982, tape recording (personal possession). Actually, few workers seemed to sign the petition with much conviction. Many were misled by supervisors’ claims that “everyone had already signed,” a play to get them to join the fashionable majority. See Salvatore, Interview; ---, interview by Nancy Gray Osterud and Laura Kirkland, May 15, 1992, summary and partial transcription (Binghamton County Immigration History Project). The petition read: “We, the undersigned, do not want to be represented by a Communist-dominated union.” Binghamton Press, Apr. 2, 1947.


82. Ibid., Mar. 29, 1947.

83. Ibid., Apr. 1, 1947. See also ibid., Apr. 3, Apr. 5, Apr. 8, Apr. 9, Apr. 11, Apr. 12, 1947. Just about every day articles, chronicling the progress of the “anti-red Crusade” appeared in local papers.

84. Endicott Bulletin, Mar. 28, 1947. The paper spread from congressional hearings and distorted Penningh’s past activities. Persisting circulated a reply to the Bulletin’s charges among union members. His reply addressed to members of the union and dated Apr. 26, 1947, is in Local 265 files, box 61, Joint Board Papers.


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102. See, for example, the numerous leaflets in the Local 285 files, box 61, Joint Board Papers. See also “United Shoe Workers of America” file in box 331, Unios Files Collection, Labor-Management Documentation Center, M. F. Cattell Library, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.


107. Conversation with William C. Fischer III.

108. John Russell to Abe Feinglass, Sept. 27, 1947, Local 285 files, box 61, Joint Board Papers. See also leaflet circulated by the union in Local 285 files.


110. The membership figures are based on financial statements of the local, Local 285 files, box 61, Joint Board Papers.

111. Kenneth Cowan and Janet Cowan, interview by Gerald Zahavi, June 2, 1982, tape recording (personal possession); Banner (speed), interview.


113. Raymond Davis to George O. Pershing, Nov. 15, 1949, Local 285 files, box 61, Joint Board Papers.

114. Binghamton Sun, May 9, 1947.


116. “Wages Increases and Decreases, March 16, 1931, to December 1, 1952.” Between 1931 and 1955, over nine million dollars in bonus payments were distributed to Endless Johnson workers—equivalent to about 30 or 40 weeks’ wages a year for every worker. “Charles F. Johnson Biographical Sketch,” n.d., box 1, ser. 1, Charles F. Johnson, Jr., Papers.


118. The corporation published retirement dinner booklets giving short profiles of retiring workers and celebrating their long years of service to the corporation. See box 13, ser. 3, Frank A. Johnson Papers, for some examples.