



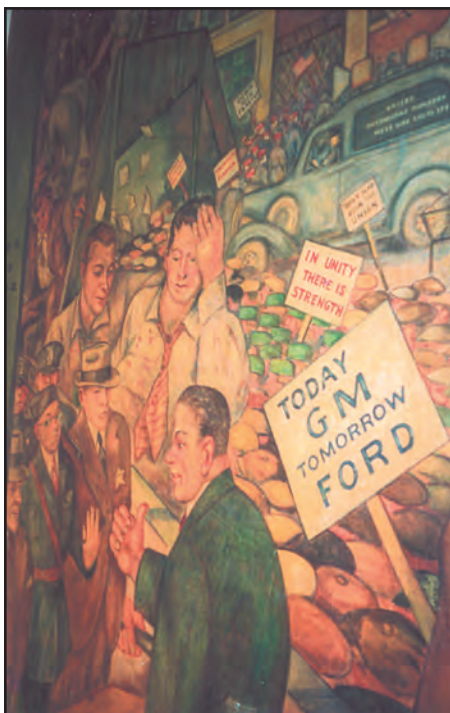
The 1937 mural by WPA artist Walter Speck hangs in the UAW New West Side Local 174 hall at 29841 Van Born Rd. in Romulus.

COURTESY UAW NEW WEST SIDE LOCAL 174

Ghost Hunting at the UAW West Side Local

BY JIM REHBERG

In 2001, volunteers went to UAW Local 174, the home local of former UAW President Walter P. Reuther, to move files, records, and — perhaps most challenging — to remove a large mural depicting many of the events in union history, from the union's hall at 6495 West Warren Ave. in Detroit and take it to the Local 157 hall in Romulus, after the two locals had merged. Walter Speck, head of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) arts program in Detroit, had painted the mural in 1937. Today it can be viewed at what is now the New West Side Local 174 hall at 29841 Van Born Rd., in Romulus. For the past several years, local members have sought to raise funds to restore the mural to its original brightness following years of exposure to ambient smoke. Jim Rehberg, a member of the UAW and the Industrial Workers of the World, recalls the days he spent during the move in this posting from his Facebook page.



Above: A detail from the mural. Contributions can be sent to the local for a fund to help restore the mural.

I remember when the old UAW Local 174 building on West Warren was being shut down to move the West Side local into the Local 157 building. I wanted to help clean out and move the local's contents. Most important was getting the mural removed to a safe place, but in the back of my mind I knew I would find an old treasure or a relic. Things don't always work out like you plan. There were boxes of old files of former members dating back to the beginning that had to be thrown away. Before they could be put in a dumpster, however, every paper had to be checked to make sure there was nothing of a person's identification such as a social security number. That was the job I got. Page after page, box after box sorted and separated, name after name, plant after plant.

This went on for days but it didn't take long for me to realize that I had found that treasure. These were the members of the local. The people who were there early on, the ones who fought



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for the rights that came easy to me because of them. The ones who paid their dues that gave the local financial power to move the union and its demands on the employers. These were names unknown to me, but they were people and workers who at one time were known by others in their shops and homes.

As I said, this went on for days — but with each name I tried to show a little respect to protect the members' identities with some gratitude for their contributions to this local. I thought of the old labor anthem *Solidarity Forever*: "Without our brain and muscle not a single wheel would turn." These were the brains and muscles that turned the wheels of the labor movement back then, but we only remember the names of the people out in front, like a Reuther — a Victor, a Walter, and maybe a Roy.

I found that treasure. It was my Fellow Workers. I didn't know their age, race, or religion, just Man or Woman. Something I have never forgotten. When I see a crowd of union people while one or two are on a stage talking, I know that hundreds and thousands are needed to hold them up.

I found the ghosts I was looking for today while looking at the mural at the New West Side Local 174. They spoke to me. I thought I heard them say, *We are the shoulders you are standing on, you have used our shoulders long enough, it's your turn.*