

WE MAKE OUR OWN HISTORY



A PORTRAIT OF THE UAW

FIGHTING THE WAR AND WINNING THE PEACE



As World War II began in Europe, the UAW was among the major organizations urging preparedness for the U.S. UAW President R. J. Thomas (third from right) shows a model for a "Defense City" of 10,000 families. With him (center) was UAW Vice-President Walter Reuther, author of a study, "500 Planes a Day" (above), a plan for converting the auto industry into defense production. Opposite, women went to work in defense plants and became active union members.

When Ford Motor Company's Harry Bennett sat down with the union to sign the first UAW contract at Ford in June, 1941, it was almost like night turning into day.

No more would workers have to face Ford's dreaded Service Dept. without protection. Under the new UAW contract, favoritism would be replaced with seniority rights, wages would rise, grievances would be heard. Why, workers and their families could even enjoy paid vacations for the first time. UAW President R. J. Thomas pointed out that organizing Ford's, the last major holdout, meant that in just four years, from 1937 to 1941, the UAW had brought almost all auto workers in the U.S.

and Canada under the protection of a union contract. Increasingly, workers in agricultural-implement plants, aircraft factories, parts shops, even offices were finding their way into this one big new industrial union.

The UAW's latest triumph had come just in time. Within months, the U.S. would enter World War II and the union would find itself having to do something most strategists try to avoid: fighting on two fronts at the same time.

Long before the actual outbreak of war, UAW members had been among the first to see the dangers of fascism first hand. A trip to Germany in the 1930s had left deep impressions of Hitler's Third Reich on future UAW President Walter Reuther and





Where autos once came down the assembly line, now defense aircraft (opposite page) rolled off. Tens of thousands of women "Rosies the Riveters" (like those pictured at bottom right) went to work in the plants, building planes, tanks, and assembling small parts. They became active union members as well.

his brother Victor. Canadian UAW members were among the first to fight the Nazis. Many signed up in 1939 when Britain mobilized to fight back against Hitler's aggression in Europe.

On the home front, UAW members fought native supporters of fascism like the Black Legion and the Ku Klux Klan, which often were centers of anti-union activity.

As the war clouds darkened, the UAW proposed in 1940 a program drafted by Walter Reuther, then the union's vice-president in charge of the General Motors Dept., to mobilize the vast unused capacity of the auto industry to build fighter bombers. Reuther knew that the planes were sorely needed to defend Britain against Nazi bombings. At the same time, he felt that gearing up for production would help prepare the country should the U.S. be drawn into the conflict. And Reuther's plan for "Five Hundred Planes a Day" also could put many laid-off workers back on the job as the country sought to climb out of a two-year economic slump. While com-

pany officials attacked the proposal as "impractical," what they really feared was Reuther's vision of a role for labor in economic planning.

On December 8, 1941, the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the UAW International Executive Board convened to discuss how workers could best help the war effort. Board members voted to place a moratorium on strikes during the war, a position later reaffirmed following an internal union debate among UAW members, and adopted by many other unions as well. Without its strike weapon, the union of course knew it would have to harness other methods to protect the interests of workers. Members learned to use their newly-won grievance procedures effectively. Appointed to the War Labor Board, the War Production Advisory Committee, and other agencies, UAW officers spoke out in defense of workers' rights. Nevertheless, some "wild-cat" strikes erupted as major corporations tried to take advantage of the no-strike pledge with speedups and poor workplace safety conditions, and by ignoring union

ROSIE THE RIVETER SPEAKS OUT

Thousands of women workers took jobs in the defense plants during World War II and became active members of the UAW.

The union created a Women's Bureau and fought for equality on the shop floor and in the pay envelope. But not all went smoothly. Some men resented the women workers, and it took a strong education campaign by the union to eventually overcome such prejudices.

One woman rank-and-filer spoke out forcefully in this letter-to-the-editor of the Women's Page of the United Automobile Worker for May 15, 1943:

I have a "beef" to air — my complaints have to do with the attitude of the men towards women who have "come into their own" by stepping into men's jobs and doing as well, if not in some cases, better than they.

It has been my personal experience that because I am a woman I was not considered qualified to fill a job that had been previously done by men only. A woman in their realm was not to be tolerated and

therefore, I was not given the chance to prove that I could do their job, perhaps not better than they, but every bit as good.

Women are rapidly becoming a vital factor in the winning of this war, yet the men refuse to really and honestly accept us in a heartfelt manner.

I have seen women held back from running as delegates perhaps to a conference or a convention because they were women; the men who were in the majority of the body that would elect such delegates, felt that a woman wasn't qualified enough to represent them.

It's high time that the men were knocked off their high

and mighty perch and shown a thing or two.

The only way that it will be done is by the women themselves. Those of us who are fortunate enough to be members of the UAW have an excellent opportunity of showing their worthiness by becoming an active part in union affairs. We should accept everything in the way of nominations to committees, etc. Now is the time to get into our unions and show our male fellow workers that we can handle union matters as well as we can handle a welding torch.

Remember, girls, a post-war period is staring us in the face! We want our jobs after the war — we certainly don't want to be discarded like old shoes when it's all over. Therefore, our place is in our unions, sticking our noses into everything, so to speak, and as CIO President Murray said, "promoting plans for an orderly transition from wartime to peacetime production."

Come on, gals! Let's become as essential in our unions as we are on the assembly line.

— HILDA CILLS

Local No. 76, UAW



Union women spurred the war effort at home, helping to keep up morale and

increase production for the fight against fascism.



Dec. 8, 1941

UAW Int'l Executive Board adopts no-strike pledge after war breaks out between the U.S. and Japan; later reaffirmed by membership poll.

1942

Union wins doubling of paid vacation time for workers with five years' seniority, in negotiations with GM. Contract also provides 4¢-per-hour pay increase, with 6¢ additional for tool-and-die and some maintenance classifications.

1942

Federal government establishes War Production Board Labor Division. UAW Pres. R. J. Thomas serves on Board, and activist Roy Reuther serves as information specialist.

1943

R. J. Thomas arrested after making a speech in Texas in violation of law requiring union organizers to register with police. Law later declared invalid.

1943

UAW urges peaceful integration of aircraft line at Packard Motor Car Co., after Ku Klux Klan tries to inflame white workers against blacks.

Feb. 28, 1944

UAW's first National Aircraft Conference plans for conversion from wartime to peacetime aircraft production.



1944

First UAW Women's Conference calls for full employment and equal pay for women.

1944

First conference of UAW veterans; union establishes Veterans Bureau and formulates a program for returning GIs.

contract provisions. Indeed, in 1944, the New York Times reported that more American workers had died in industrial accidents at home than the number of U.S. soldiers killed so far on the battlefields. Near the end of the war, the UAW published figures showing how leading defense contractors had profited to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars from their government war contracts.

Coping with the pressures of war, and having to deal with profiteering corporations, an ongoing debate on the no-strike issue, and other problems, the UAW still used its resources to expand workers' rights on the shop floor and in the community. As companies re-tooled from cars to planes, tanks, and guns, the union negotiated to save the original seniority of members laid off during the transition. It acted to defend the rights of women and minority workers to take production jobs that were outside the companies' traditional ghettos of the sewing room or the foundry.

When some workers sought to protest the growing presence of black workers, President Thomas and other UAW leaders acted quickly to end such strife. The union engaged in an extensive educational program on racial equality, and in the community worked closely with groups like the NAACP on issues like fair housing, voting rights, and equal pay. It organized a Fair Employment Practices Dept. and Women's Bureau, fighting for 24-hour, quality child care to help working mothers, and it helped organize community support groups for women who faced the stress of raising

a family and working six to seven days a week, 10-16 hours a day.

"We proved during the war that it can all be done — work, home, job, as long as society is committed to making it work," recalls Mildred Jeffrey, the first director of the UAW Women's Bureau. "For example, we helped set up neighborhood kitchens where women could stop on the way home to pick up a hot, nourishing meal for their families. Many women's organizations are looking again at our war-time innovations for ideas on how to help working women today."

The union also fought against price-gouging and black marketeering. A full-time UAW office in Washington D.C. agitated for price stabilization and quality consumer goods. It battled for adequate housing for the workers who flooded the industrial centers. In Detroit, a model "Defense City" was designed to propose adequate, fair housing.

While all that was going on at home, over a quarter-million UAW members were in the Armed Forces, scattered throughout various war zones. The union kept in touch with them by sending special clip-out editions of the union newspaper or organizing local letter-writing campaigns, and it sponsored two "goodwill" trips to Army training centers.

The union also stepped up its political involvement during the war years. Following right-wing gains in the 1942 mid-term Congressional elections, the CIO set up its own Political Action Committee (PAC). Unions worked hard to assure that GIs could vote, even if they were far away in Europe or the Far East. Massive voter-

THE UAW-CIO MAKES THE ARMY ROLL AND GO . . .

Pete Seeger and the Almanac Singers wrote this song in the early days of World War II to help keep morale up on the home front:

I was standing round a defense town one day
When I thought I overheard a soldier say:
"Every tank in our camp has that UAW stamp.
And I'm UAW too, I'm proud to say."

CHORUS:

It's the UAW-CIO, makes the army roll and go;
Turning out the jeeps and trucks and airplanes ev'ry day.
It's the UAW-CIO, makes the army roll and go,
Puts wheels on the U.S.A.
There'll be a union label in Berlin
When those union boys in uniform march in;
And rolling in those ranks there'll be UAW tanks;
Roll Hitler out and roll the union in!

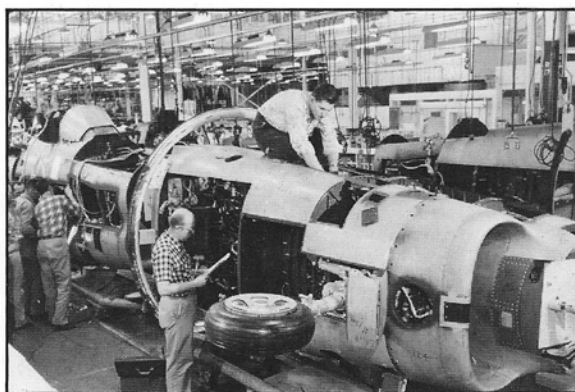


"Every tank in our camp has that UAW stamp . . .

Roll Hitler out and roll the union in!"



War-time scenes: Women workers from UAW Local 762 at Briggs Aircraft proudly ride the union's float in a Detroit Labor Day parade. At the UAW's 1942 convention in Chicago (center left), President R. J. Thomas and Vice Presidents Walter Reuther and Richard Frankensteen lead singing. In a converted airplane plant (center, right), workers roll aircraft off the line.



Labor fought for democracy at home, too. At bottom, members of the baseball team of District 65 (now a UAW affiliate) marched in New York City on behalf of integrating major-league baseball, finally begun in 1946 when Jackie Robinson signed with the Brooklyn Dodgers.

WAR-TIME RECIPES

Rationing of meat, sugar, and other food forced UAW members to be creative in what they prepared for their war-time factory lunch-boxes. Here are typical sandwich recipes circulated to UAW workers in 1943:

BEAN SANDWICH

Season baked beans with plenty of minced onion, pickle relish, or catsup, and moisten with salad dressing for a hearty sandwich filling. Chopped peanuts and beans are another good combination.

CHEESE CRUNCH

1/4 pound cheese put through food chopper, chopped pepper, chopped peanuts. Mix and spread on buttered whole-grain or enriched white bread.





Crowds hail the end of World War II, and the union turns its attention to the question of bringing returning soldiers into the workforce without displacing women workers.

registration drives and educational efforts helped re-elect Franklin Delano Roosevelt to his fourth term in 1944, and made sure there would be a Democratic-controlled Congress.

As victory approached, the UAW was armed with programs and ideas to assure that the end of the war would not mean a disruption in employment for the thousands of UAW members involved in defense work.

As he had in the pre-war years, Walter Reuther helped develop a plan for conversion — but this time to replace produc-

tion for war with production for peace. The plan's centerpiece was to put America's industrial capacity to work building homes, schools, transportation systems, and the other social needs that had been neglected during the war. Such a plan, Reuther reasoned, could assure full employment — not only for the returning GIs, but for the "Rosies the Riveters" who wanted to stay employed.

Meanwhile, Emil Mazey, another union activist, was defending the rights of GIs abroad to be demobilized and brought home. Stationed in the Far East, Mazey organized rallies for return until the Army isolated him on a small island. In 1947, Mazey, a veteran of the UAW's earliest organizing drives and a president of UAW Local 212 in Detroit, was elected Secretary-Treasurer, succeeding George Addes, who had served in that post since the union's founding convention in 1935.

During this period, the UAW developed a reputation as being firmly committed to world peace and disarmament, a tradition that still is an important part of UAW activities. The union fought hard to bring about the creation of the United Nations. It helped organize international trade-union bodies to further worldwide worker solidarity.

As union members came home from the wars overseas, they found a union that had matured and was ready to fight a new war at home — one for economic and social justice.

KEEP AMERICA WORKING

As the war drew to a close, the UAW convened a national conference of veterans to outline a program for keeping plants humming by reconvert-ing defense factories to civilian production. Here is a digest of the union program:

In foxhole and in factory, millions of our fighting and production soldiers are asking the question: After victory — what? Will history repeat itself? Will our heroes return to sell apples? Will their brothers from the production front join them in bread lines? . . .

In producing for war, we can reach an annual income of \$200 billion. The same manpower, the same plant and equipment and the same know-

how can produce just as abundantly for peace. But it takes planning . . . Full employment and full production require government direction and coordination, with labor

and management participating. . . .

The UAW calls for:

1. A Peace Production Board, composed of representatives of government, manag-

ment, labor, farmers, and consumers . . . to plan, organize and direct the conversion of our war economy to peace production.

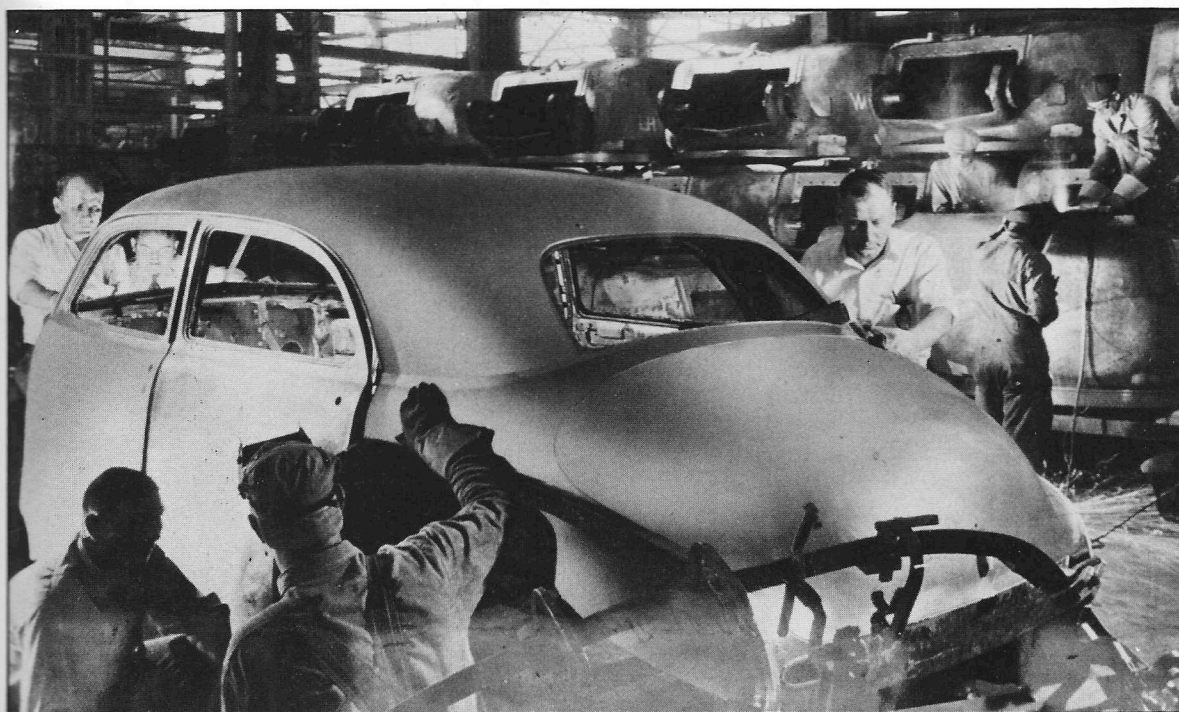
2. The government shall operate, as a yardstick, government plants in monopolistic or semi-monopolistic industries, or industries strategic to national welfare and defense.

3. A vast public works program, not as a glorified WPA, but as a permanent part of a healthy, expanding economy, must be formulated. Projects should include community buildings, such as hospitals, schools, and recreation centers, flood control, and power development . . . highways and airports, etc. A housing program alone can provide employment for 3 million people.



Union members meet to discuss the reconversion of the defense industry

into peacetime production at a UAW conference near the end of the war.



The end of the war brought joy to the nation, but new challenges for workers. The UAW sought a smooth conversion from wartime to peacetime production. At left, postwar passenger cars come off a line as tank bodies hang suspended in back. Center, unemployed workers line up at the U.S. Employment Service Offices on East Jefferson Ave. in Detroit, August 20, 1945. Delegates to the 1944 UAW convention (bottom, right) discuss the union's plan for the postwar world, while Chicago workers march to save the Office of Price Administration (OPA) and price controls. Elsewhere, UAW members urged consumers to declare a "meat strike" to protest the high cost of meat.

