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## **A Cold War at International Harvester: The Shachtmanites and the Farm Equipment Workers Union's Demise, 1946–1955**

**VICTOR G. DEVINATZ**

*ABSTRACT:* The Workers Party (WP)/Independent Socialist League (ISL), whose members were known as the Shachtmanites, obtained control of United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 6 through the dominant Positive Action Caucus (PAC). The Shachtmanite-led PAC red-baited the United Farm Equipment and Metal Workers Union (FE), the first time in U. S. trade union history in which a Marxist organization of the ostensibly revolutionary left aided in the destruction of a Communist Party USA–led union. Using Local 6 as the base from which to attack the FE, whose membership was concentrated in the Chicago-area Harvester plants, the PAC demonized Local 6's CPUSA-led caucus, the Committee to Build Local 6 (CBL6), by arguing that it was pro-CPUSA, pro-FE and anti-UAW. Once the PAC successfully painted the CBL6 as the adversary within the local possessing an ideology “foreign” to the UAW, it was easy to portray the FE as being the UAW's major enemy, which had to be destroyed at any cost.

**C**OMMENCING WITH THE COLD WAR, a domestic anti-Communist campaign came to dominate United States politics from approximately 1946 through 1956. Known as McCarthyism, this crusade's objective was to eliminate all vestiges of Communist (or alleged Communist) activity and influence within the United States. Virtually no segment of American society, including Hollywood, the public education system, the federal civil service, and the labor movement, remained untouched by this scourge.

During the McCarthy era, local, state and national government (Congress and federal agencies), and employers, engaged in a whole-

sale assault on trade unions. With the help of certain labor leaders, Communist Party USA (CPUSA)–led unions came under particularly harsh attack (Schrecker, 1998; Caute, 1978). The Taft-Hartley Act was passed in 1947; Section 9(h) required union officials to sign affidavits stating that they were neither CPUSA members nor affiliated with the Party in any way. Refusal of leaders to sign meant a union could not be certified as a bargaining agent with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), was disallowed from organizing through the NLRB certification election process, and was not permitted to file unfair labor practice charges against employers with the NLRB. Filing a false affidavit could result in a union leader being charged with perjury, the penalties being a \$10,000 fine, ten years imprisonment, or both. Employers — Bethlehem Steel, Lockheed Aircraft, and Firestone Tire and Rubber, for example — terminated employees for (actual or alleged) CPUSA membership or sympathies. In many of these cases, in which the worker possessed collective bargaining representation, the union failed to defend the employee (Caute, 1978, 355, 360–375).

Oftentimes the role of labor leaders in McCarthyism was as repugnant as that of employers and the government. The purge, by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), of the 11 CPUSA-led unions in 1949–1950, with approximately 900,000 members, was preceded by leading CIO anti-Communists — especially Walter Reuther of the United Auto Workers (UAW) and Joe Curran of the National Maritime Union — eliminating Communists from their union’s leadership. Following the expulsion of these CPUSA-led unions from the CIO, the industrial federation moved quickly to establish rival unions for recruiting workers back to the fold; creation of the International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE), which conducted raids on the United Electrical Workers (UE) from 1950 to 1960, is a case in point (Caute, 1978, 352–353).

The craft-oriented American Federation of Labor (AFL) unions also launched drives to rid their organizations of Communists. In fact, by 1954, 59 of 100 AFL and CIO unions modified their constitutions to ban Communists from running for office. Forty of these 59 unions went further by also barring Communists from membership. Union members who were discovered to be Communists were often expelled and these decisions were sustained by the courts (Caute, 1978, 353).

These attacks against the CPUSA-led unions, or Communists within unions, were conducted by anti-Communist labor leaders of various political stripes, even social democratic ones like Reuther. In the literature on McCarthyism within the labor movement, however, there is no discussion of the role of a Marxist organization of the ostensibly revolutionary left, which contributed to the government's, employers' and unions' attacks on CPUSA-led unions. In this article, I argue that the Workers Party (WP)/Independent Socialist League (ISL) — also known as the Shachtmanites, from the name of their leader, Max Shachtman (Wald, 1987, 193–199) — obtained control of UAW Local 6's dominant Positive Action Caucus (PAC) and played a major role in the destruction of the CPUSA-led United Farm Equipment and Metal Workers Union (FE). Of all the UAW Harvester locals, Local 6 took on this function because the Shachtmanite-led PAC, a rabidly anti-Communist and pro-Reuther faction, used Local 6 as the base from which to attack the FE, whose membership was concentrated in the Chicago-area Harvester plants.

Because of the Local 6 leadership's politics, the local refused to form a united front with the FE locals in dealing with Harvester. In order to gain support for its anti-FE activities, the PAC demonized Local 6's CPUSA-led caucus, the Committee to Build Local 6 (CBL6), which sought unity between the UAW and the FE in battling Harvester. By arguing that the CBL6 was pro-CPUSA, pro-FE and anti-UAW, the PAC portrayed the CBL6's ideology as being "foreign" to the UAW. Once the PAC successfully painted the CBL6 as the adversary within the local, it was easy to portray the FE as being the UAW's major enemy which had to be destroyed at any cost.

The UAW–FE rivalry, which accelerated after the CIO's expulsions of the FE and other CPUSA-led unions, reached a crescendo in 1952 when both the FE and UAW Local 6 struck Harvester at approximately the same time, with Local 6 actively sabotaging the FE strike. Although the FE gamely tried to hang on after this disastrous strike, continuing UAW raids against the FE led it to seek affiliation with the UAW in 1955.

The significance of this cold-war struggle is that this was the first time in U. S. trade union history that a Marxist organization of the ostensibly revolutionary left engaged in red-baiting which led to *destroying* a CPUSA-led union. Even though the WP/ISL promoted a programmatic militancy and had an orientation toward rank-and-file

mobilization, which the Shachtmanites believed was necessary for the building of a viable left-wing unionism, this goal became displaced by the group's obsession with combating Communism in the UAW and the U. S. labor movement in general.

The group's systematic anti-Communism led the Shachtmanites to give comfort to employers, even perhaps against their own perceptions and desires, as well as to Reuther's machine in the UAW. Even though the Shachtmanite brand of red-baiting had the same goals, and achieved identical results, as the Reutherite style of red-baiting, it was qualitatively different. The WP/ISL's red-baiting was of an *ideological nature*, while Reuther's was primarily pragmatic and opportunistic, so that he could vanquish a formidable political opponent, the Communists, in his quest for ultimate control of the UAW.

Because of Reuther's overture to the left in 1946 and the WP's plans to create an independent shop-floor unionism in the UAW, the Shachtmanites first considered themselves to be "critical Reutherites." By 1949, however, their zealous anti-Communism resulted in the Shachtmanites becoming "uncritical Reutherites." Nonetheless, by 1955, Reuther had exploited, and coopted, the Shachtmanites to get what he wanted — the FE's destruction — as opposed to the Shachtmanites using Reuther to establish a sustainable and independent shop-floor unionism.

#### *Brief History of International Harvester and Its Melrose Park Plant*

Located 13 miles west of downtown Chicago, the Melrose Park plant, constructed in 1941, manufactured the Pratt-Wittney radial type of aircraft engine used primarily in the B-24 bomber. The Defense Plant Corporation, a federal agency, designated that General Motors (GM) would run the plant (Karsh, 1950, 41). UAW Local 6 obtained representation rights for the Melrose Park workers by easily winning the May 1942 NLRB certification election.

When the plant closed in the middle of August 1945 after the war's conclusion, International Harvester purchased the factory from the U. S. government that November (Seidman, *et al.*, 1958, 92). Created in 1902 through a merger between the McCormick Company and several harvesting and haying machines manufacturers, Harvester soon became one of the nation's largest corporations, with 28 manu-

facturing plants (as well as steel mills and iron mines) located predominantly in Chicago and the Midwest. Besides developing a full line of agricultural implements, Harvester also made trucks and earth-moving equipment; refrigeration equipment also was produced until 1956 (Gilpin, 1989, 45; Melcher, 1964, 39–41).

From 1902 until 1957, Harvester was the major U. S. agricultural equipment manufacturer, although this line decreased from 70% (in 1910) to approximately 33% (in 1955) of the company's sales, largely due to the stunning growth of the motor truck division. In 1910, these sales accounted for a mere three percent of Harvester's total, but by 1957 nearly 50% came from motor trucks (Melcher, 1964, 41, 44). In 1946, Harvester began manufacturing earth-moving machinery, power units and related items. By 1957, this construction equipment division generated \$154 million or 13.2% of total sales. Thus, the firm's share in the construction equipment market was nearly as great as its stake in agricultural implements, excluding farm tractors (Melcher, 1964, 44).

*The Origins of the FE and the 1946 UAW-FE Election Campaign at Melrose Park*

The FE, a 70,000-member union at its peak in 1948, had overlapping jurisdictions with the UAW. Originating as the Farm Equipment Division of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee in July 1938, the CIO chartered the FE as the international union whose jurisdiction encompassed the farm equipment industry. However, in 1937 the UAW gained a foothold in the agricultural implement ("ag imp") industry with the negotiation of a contract at J. I. Case's Racine (Wisconsin) plant and altered its constitution to include "ag imp" workers in its jurisdiction (Melcher, 1964, 66–7).

Prior to the Second World War, the UAW's primary strength in "ag imp" was at John Deere, although it had obtained contracts at the West Allis (Wisconsin) tractor plant, several J. I. Case factories, and some smaller "ag imp" companies. Until 1945, the unions' rivalry was managed by having the FE take authority over the "ag imp" plants and the UAW controlling the truck plants. However, after the war, both unions competed to organize new facilities (Melcher, 1964, 67).

Early in 1946 Harvester rehired many returning servicemen who had worked for GM and had been Local 6 members during the war

years (Seidman, *et al.*, 1958, 92; Stack, 1989; Shier, 1989b). By the middle of the summer of 1946, a UAW Local 6 Organizing Committee had been reconstituted, led by former Local 6 activists, with the union initiating organizing drives in the three new Harvester plants in Louisville (Kentucky), Evansville (Indiana), and Memphis. At this time, the FE was the dominant union at the company with 22 union locals (Seidman, *et al.*, 1958, 92; Burns, 1946, 5).

The Melrose Park campaign was characterized by animosity, with the issues primarily focused on the two unions' past records. Melrose Park FE Local 103 emphasized that 90% of all Harvester farm implement workers (over 30,000 workers) were FE members, and that the FE Harvester contracts were the industry's best, vastly superior to those of the UAW (DRP, [1946]).

While CPUSA members were active within FE Local 103, cadres of the Workers Party (WP), the "Shachtmanites," were the leading UAW Local 6 organizers. Formed in 1940 after a split from the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) over the "Russian Question," the WP viewed the Soviet Union's politico-economic system to be a form of "bureaucratic collectivism" (Wald, 1987, 182–192). In the UAW Local 6 Organizing Committee, two of the main organizers, Carl Shier and Seymour Kahan, were Shachtmanites who later would become instrumental in formulating Local 6's policies through their leadership roles in the PAC.

On November 12, 1946, the UAW obtained a decisive victory, receiving 714 votes to the FE's 231 votes in the production and maintenance employees' unit. The FE fared even worse in the Tool Room, obtaining only four votes to the UAW's 49 votes and the AFL's International Association of Machinists' 44 votes (HYC, [1946]). However, by the end of October 1948, Local 6 had more than tripled in size to nearly 3,500 members (CSPC, 1948).

Key shop-floor organizers from both unions have acknowledged that the UAW's win was largely due to the workers' direct experience or knowledge of Local 6 during the war. Although the UAW did not mention the FE's ties to the CPUSA in its campaign literature, it was linked to the Party by "word of mouth," most likely negatively (Shier, 1989a; Stack, 1989; Roth, 1989a; Kahan, 1989).

According to Jesse Gipson, a former FE Local 103 Organizing Committee member, the FE's electoral support came from mostly "left-wing whites" and "the majority of blacks" because the union was

“more progressive” on civil rights issues. However, with the plant composed of mostly Greeks, Italian and Poles and with only four percent made up of African American workers, the latter group’s overwhelming support for the FE barely affected the election outcome (Gipson, 1989; Ozanne, 1967, 192). Norm Roth, the FE’s main organizer, claims that the Melrose Park win shifted the balance of power at Harvester towards the UAW (Roth, 1989a).

*The Expression of the UAW–FE Rivalry Within Local 6:  
The PAC and the CBL6*

From 1949 through the late 1950s, Local 6’s two major factions, both of which articulated left-wing platforms, were the Shachtmanite-led PAC, formed by the UAW Local 6 Organizing Committee leaders, and the CPUSA-led CBL6, established by the FE Local 103 Organizing Committee leadership. Although members in both caucuses envisioned a socialist future, one major programmatic difference was that the CBL6 called for the UAW and the FE to unite against Harvester while the PAC committed itself to the FE’s destruction and achieving unity in fighting the company only through the FE’s absorption into the UAW.

Because of the Shachtmanites’ vehement opposition to the CPUSA and its activities within the trade unions and their strong adherence to Reutherism, Carl Shier and Seymour Kahan, the two WP activists who were PAC leaders, led Local 6’s sustained attack on both the CBL6 and the FE. They emerged as the local’s most dedicated and vocal exponents of Reutherism, even if it was initially a left-wing version in the late 1940s.

Although the WP was ostensibly a Leninist organization, the Party did not give its cadres direct orders to be carried out in their trade union work. In fact, the WP underwent a political trajectory away from even a nominal Leninism by the early 1950s. Renaming itself the Independent Socialist League (ISL) in 1949, in the next several years it moved away from an “unorthodox” Trotskyism to a type of Marxism more consistent with a variant of left-wing social democracy (Wald, 1987, 295).

The WP’s fervent opposition to Communism in the UAW and the American trade union movement can be traced back to shortly after its formation. This ideology motivated much of the Shachtmanites’



strategy in the UAW through the mid-1950s. The Shachtmanites were against U. S. participation in World War II, and as a consequence opposed the no-strike pledge. This opposition provided them with definite standing among certain segments of the workers and some foundation for labeling the CPUSA-led factions as followers of the Soviet line. This was illustrated during the middle of the World War II era when the WP criticized one of the UAW's two major groupings, the Addes faction, led by George Addes who was elected UAW Secretary-Treasurer in 1946, for being Communist-controlled. The Shachtmanites argued that the Addes faction promoted "the interests of the reactionary Russian bureaucracy" within the UAW and that "the most conscious, best-organized and most dangerous right wing in the labor movement today is the Stalinist wing" (Shachtman, 1943, 60–61). Several years later, their position was equally virulent. According to a 1948 WP internal bulletin:

We consider the Stalinists the greatest internal danger to the development of the American working class. Therefore, in situations in the labor movement where the only practical alternative we have is a choice between organizational control of the unions by the Stalinists or by the native American labor bureaucracy, whether this be progressive or even conservative, we will give organizational support to the bureaucracy against the Stalinists. (NUSCRR, 1948.)

This view demonstrates that the Shachtmanites' anti-Communism was ideologically based and the group was willing to cede control of a union to *conservative* forces in order to keep Communists from leading a union. This meant that the WP was willing to sacrifice rank-and-file mobilization and militancy on the shop floor, which was more likely to occur in CPUSA-led unions (Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, 2002), for a Communist-free union.

Because of its vehement anti-Communism, the WP fraction in the UAW aligned with the Reuther faction in its fight against the CPUSA-supported Thomas–Addes Caucus in 1946–7. Reuther conducted his struggle against the Thomas–Addes forces, arguing that the CPUSA should be opposed because it was the submissive broker of a totalitarian force, the Soviet Union. Although Reuther won the 1946 election for the UAW presidency by a razor-thin margin, the Thomas–Addes faction obtained the majority of International Executive Board seats.

While the Shachtmanites supported and actively worked for a Reuther Caucus victory in its battle with the Addes faction in the 1946 elections “as the lesser of two evils,” after the vote the WP believed that it was essential to attempt to construct an independent force within the union to oppose Reuther. The Party called for its members to establish fairly broad progressive groups that would consist of WP auto unionists, Party sympathizers, left-wing Reutherites, and non-CPUSA supporters of the Addes–Communist grouping. According to the Shachtmanites, only after a phase of concentrated educational work and experience with the Reuther leadership’s class-collaborationist nature would these groups be able to act independently and wield decisive influence within the UAW (MGC, 1946, 3).

After a year of intense fighting between the two groups, Reuther consolidated his control over the union in 1947 when he was reelected president with an Executive Board overwhelmingly dominated by his caucus (Howe and Widick, 1949, 149–171). Although the WP initially expressed several major criticisms of Reuther, the Shachtmanites argued that the Reuther group should be supported

because the great bulk of the most advanced and progressive militants are to be found — and not by accident in the Reuther camp. These militants are not yet revolutionary socialists but they represent what is unmistakably *the left wing* of the UAW. (Shachtman, 1947, 3.)

While in the immediate postwar period, the WP auto cadres considered themselves to be “critical Reutherites,” by 1949 the ISL auto trade unionists had been fully integrated into the Reuther Caucus and had been clearly transformed into both loyal and “uncritical Reutherites” (MSC, n.d.; Drucker, 1994, 238). In a policy statement written by Herman Benson in August 1949, Reuther was called the “unchallengeable single leader” who had transformed the auto union into the “vanguard of the American labor movement.” When offered potential leadership choices, ISL members would support “more progressive Reutherites” rather than conservative ones, but organizing an independent challenge to Reuther was dismissed as foolish (Drucker, 1994, 238).

According to Carl Shier, the Shachtmanites’ primary role in the PAC was exercising “whatever we thought was necessary leadership,” claiming an agenda was never developed in private and then pushed

on the faction. Instead, all strategies and tactics were discussed out in the open with the caucus (Shier, 1989b).

Formed in December 1949, the CBL6 was the first CPUSA-led caucus in Local 6 that achieved stability emerging from the remnants of three prior CPUSA-supported/influenced factions that had been temporary formations organized to run slates in the annual elections. Although the 10 CPUSA members in the plant, the majority being African American, became the faction's nucleus, there were several individuals who were not Party members who played a prominent role throughout the caucus' existence. The faction's establishment also was significant because it was the first stable caucus, based on actual programmatic differences, that was formed in opposition to the PAC (HYC, n.d. (a) ; HYC, n.d. (b); HYC, [1949]; Roth, 1989b).

With the CPUSA's 12 top leaders indicted under the Smith Act in 1948 for allegedly advocating the U. S. government's overthrow by force and violence; and with the CIO's expulsion of the CPUSA-led unions in 1949–1950; it was an inauspicious time to be associated in any manner with Communists. At this time, the CPUSA was literally falling apart at the seams. Its best cadres were going underground, many members were either asked to leave or left on their own and its diminishing resources were devoted to fighting endless legal battles. With the Party being almost entirely isolated, it is not surprising that the Reutherites and their Shachtmanite allies were able to marginalize the CBL6 within Local 6.

The CBL6's leader throughout the caucus' decade-long tenure was CPUSA member Norman Roth, who Harvester hired in 1946 after his discharge from the army. Prior to entering the service, Roth had served as the UAW Local 201's Financial Secretary (Douglas Aircraft in Chicago), in the early 1940s (Roth, 1989a; Stack, 1989).

The faction's positions, largely based on the CPUSA's trade union platform, included a strong civil rights plank for the plant's African American workers (Roth, 1989c). This led the CBL6 to receive electoral support from approximately 80% of Local 6's African American members (Gipson, 1989). The CBL6 also continually called for the negotiation of FE contractual clauses in Local 6's agreement, while emphasizing that UAW–FE “labor unity” made sense because of the same problems confronting both unions at Harvester (NA, n.d. (a); Gilpin, 1988, 26–7).

Its contracts with Harvester and the FE's shop floor unionism represented a dramatically different vision of trade unionism than

that possessed by the UAW. While the UAW accepted “the politics of productivity” and the institutionalization of collective bargaining, the FE promoted “the politics of class conflict,” believing that capital and labor possessed unalterably opposing interests (Gilpin, 1992, 257, 268). To the FE, the contract characterized a truce in the class war, not the end of it. While Reuther advocated that the UAW’s focus should be the negotiation of collective bargaining agreements that were mutually beneficial to both the company and the union, the FE advocated no such thing, believing that a union’s strength should revolve around the construction of a rank-and-file unionism where the contract would *not* be considered the “workplace rule of law” (Gilpin, 1992, 252–307; 279 for quotation). Thus, rather than interpreting the collective bargaining agreement as a restrictive legal document, both national and local FE leaders utilized the contract to defend the workers when it was helpful but discarded it when it was not (Gilpin, 1988, 25–26).

For example, unlike the UAW, the FE felt that the grievance procedure should be uncomplicated, nonbureaucratic, and not overly legalistic. After the UAW–FE merger in 1955, many former FE leaders perceived the UAW’s grievance process to be bureaucratic, complicated and cumbersome. For example, James Wright, a past leader of FE Local 236 (Louisville), contrasted the FE and UAW strategies for resolving grievances:

Our strategy (in the FE) was hit ’em, get the case for the man, get him a clean job, get his money that’s due him, and go on. But the UAW had a department, they had people handling grievances, they had people over here at this desk, so that when we went into the UAW, I said, “What the hell have all you got in there? Is this an office workers’ union, or what is this?” Hell, all we had (in the FE) was a plain old brown contract, write the grievance, we knew what we were doing. But over there in the UAW, you had a department of people to say, well, this comes under this classification, this skill is here, and all this business. (Gilpin, 1988, 20.)

Furthermore, the FE abandoned the grievance procedure when it was deemed ineffective. While the union’s contract allowed authorized strikes to be held after using the grievance procedure, the FE often conducted shop-floor job actions and wildcat strikes as an alternative to filing grievances to achieve industrial justice (Gilpin, 1988, 25–26).

In addition, the FE's shop-floor orientation was reflected in the difference in the number of work stoppages, many of them wildcat strikes, conducted by the UAW and the FE from October 1, 1945 through October 31, 1952. During this seven-year period, the UAW held 185 work stoppages compared to 971 walkouts conducted by the FE. In any given year, the FE engaged in at least twice as many strikes as the UAW; from October 1, 1946 to October 1, 1947, this ratio was greater than ten to one (LMDC, [1953?]). Ozanne (1967, 214) concludes that the FE's strategy was to conduct "short, intracontract stoppages," while the UAW preferred to organize longer, and legalized, walkouts.

Because Reuther and the UAW failed to promote a vibrant shop-floor unionism, they were willing to negotiate contractual restrictions concerning the holding of unauthorized work stoppages. For instance, in the UAW's 1948 national agreement with Harvester, the union agreed to help end any unapproved walkouts when they occurred on the shop floor. The FE, on the other hand, refused to include such a provision in its 1948 contract or in any agreement thereafter. Even after the union's catastrophic strike against Harvester in 1952, the FE still refused to end unauthorized walkouts (Gilpin, 1988, 26–27).

In spite of the FE's different orientation, the CBL6 still believed that the UAW and the FE could achieve "labor unity" in fighting Harvester, and this led the caucus to vehemently oppose the UAW's raids on the FE. The CBL6 blamed the UAW International's and Local 6's problems with Harvester on the disunity of the UAW, the FE and the AFL unions, and called for "a united front of all unions holding contracts with Harvester," some 90,000 workers in over 20 different unions (HYC, 1953a; UAWL6C, 1953a).

*The PAC's Tactics for Demonizing the CBL6:  
Pro-CP, Pro-FE, and Anti-UAW*

The PAC's dominance from 1950 to 1955 can be attributed to the faction's construction of a sophisticated electoral machine (Shier, 1989a; Guido, 1989; HYC, n.d.(c)) and to the caucus becoming Reutherism's major advocate in the local which, after 1947, became the union's only caucus at the national level. This development led to an end of ideological debates over union policies in the UAW

International. According to Seymour Kahan, once Reuther established his regime, “the ideological aspect” of the Local 6 caucuses “fell away, just like a missile goes into space and falls away” with one important exception — “the Communist Party” (WHC, 1949; Kahan, 1989).

Because the CBL6 rejected Reutherism and continually called for UAW–FE unity in battling Harvester, the PAC painted the CBL6 as being anti-UAW because its positions differed from the UAW International’s policies. It also used the CBL6’s pro-CPUSA and pro-FE stances as additional evidence that the caucus was anti-UAW.

The PAC continually raised these points in election campaigns and debates with the CBL6 throughout the early to mid-1950s. For example, before the 1950 runoff elections for local union officers on March 28, 1950, the PAC issued a leaflet attacking CBL6 leader Norm Roth, stating in part:

WHY DOES ROTH CONSISTENTLY SUPPORT THE OPPONENT OF SKINNER, and the rest of Positive Action? Simply because Roth follows the line of the Communist Party. The Party’s policy at the present time is violently anti-C.I.O., especially anti-Reuther and the U.A.W. Any group that will strengthen a local of the U.A.W., help its membership has to be fought by Roth. A group that will weaken a local, help the campaign against the U.A.W. has to be supported. That is the reason, and the only reason for Roth’s monkeybusiness (sic). Roth is opposed to POSITIVE ACTION candidates because they are the only ones who have the guts to oppose him on the floor of membership meetings. Roth’s program — aid to FE–UE, bum rap UAW. (HYC, 1950c.)

During the 1951 local union elections, the PAC emphasized that the CBL6 was a “Pro-F.E.–Stalin” caucus that was only concerned with “plugging for the pet projects of Joe Stalin” (HYC, 1951a). At the start of the 1953 election campaign for the UAW Convention delegates, the PAC once more described the CBL6 opposition as being both anti-UAW and pro-FE:

They also consist of a small handfull (sic) of followers of the Communist Party who have been against our union and its leadership from the very start and who oppose everything and anything our union does. They are *not* honest critics who would like to see our union grow stronger. They are loyal to F.E. (Farm Equipment workers), which is a communist dominated union

and a rival to our union. Anything they can do to hurt our union and help F.E. they will do. (HYC, 1953b.)

And in the election campaign for the Executive Board and the Shop Committee, later in 1953, Roth and the CBL6 were attacked again:

First of all there is Roth's group (the Builders). Now anyone in the shop any length of time knows that he is and has been a follower of the commie line. . . . Seven years ago, when our union tried to get bargaining rights at this plant he fought against our union and tried to get in the Farm Equipment Workers (F.E.) which has been thrown out of the CIO for being dominated by the Communist Party. Whenever we have had a drive to organize Harvester workers under the UAW-CIO banner and thus strengthen us at Melrose Park he has supported F.E. In every activity including strikes he has sabotaged a solid front against the company by playing politics and trying to advance his own cause. (HYC, 1953c.)

And in the 1954 local union elections, the PAC stated in one leaflet:

The rest of the opposition is the old Roth group — missnamed (sic) the Committee to Build Local 6. A group that has followed the anti-labor line of the communists. . . . This group never had anything but praise for FE and condemnation for the "Reutherite" UAW . . . (HYC, 1954a.)

And in another leaflet:

The so-called "brain" behind our opposition is Norm Roth. Anyone in the shop for any length of time knows what "party" he is loyal to, knows that his loyalty lies with the communist dominated FE-UE and knows what country he is loyal to. (HYC, 1954b.)

Through such tactics, the PAC was able to discredit the CBL6's ideas in the majority of members' minds by claiming that the caucus was merely a CPUSA mouthpiece and loyal only to the FE. This eliminated any discussion based on the merits of the CBL6's ideas, because the PAC claimed that caucus members were not "honest" trade unionists but only loyal to the CPUSA, FE and, ultimately, the Soviet Union. Additionally, these attacks on the CBL6 helped the PAC to justify Local 6's role in the UAW's raids on the FE.

*The UAW–FE Rivalry: The Existence of Intraclass Conflict*

The UAW–FE rivalry heated up in 1945 upon the war’s conclusion. In 1947, the UAW membership rejected a proposed merger with the FE when the Reuther Caucus actively opposed the combination, believing that the FE’s addition to the UAW would tip the union’s balance of power in the direction of the CPUSA-supported Thomas–Addes forces. When the CIO expelled the FE and the other CPUSA-led unions in 1949–1950, the industrial union federation sanctioned raids by the UAW against the FE. In an attempt to protect itself, the FE merged with another expelled union, the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE), becoming the FE–UE in 1950 (Gilpin, 1989, 48).

In Chicago, the FE’s base, both the PAC leadership and UAW Local 6 actively fueled this rivalry. The International Union hired several of the local’s leaders to temporary staff positions for mounting raids against FE-represented plants. For example, Carl Shier was employed in the raid on the tiny Stockton Works in California (HYC, 1949a). The UAW successfully spoiled the FE’s chances in the NLRB election, held in early May 1949, where the International Association of Machinists (IAM) polled 96 votes, the UAW received 66 votes and the FE obtained 34 votes, resulting in a run-off election to be held between the IAM and the UAW (CCC, 1949; HYC, 1949b).

In a May 4, 1949 letter to the Stockton Works employees, FE organizer Wyndham Mortimer, a former UAW International vice-president, argued that the FE “would have had a clear majority” and won the election if not for the UAW’s disruptive tactics. Blaming FE’s loss in this election on both the UAW’s and Shier’s red-baiting tactics, Mortimer stated:

Having no accomplishments to offer workers, the UAW concentrates on confusing people with red scares. You heard such red scares directed at me and the other FE–CIO organizers during the campaign. But you never heard any proof that we ever sold out workers or disorganized them. . . . Unfortunately, there are lots of Shiers in the UAW today. They cover up their misdeeds by using red-baiting tricks. (HYC, 1949b.)

Besides hiring Shier, the UAW International tapped two other Local 6 officers elected in 1949 to temporary positions. Dick Moss, a



Shop Committeeman, and Roy Dahlke, the Local 6 President, were assigned to be organizers in the 1950 attempted raid at Harvester's Tractor Works (FE Local 101) in Chicago (HYC, 1949a; CCC, 1949; DRP, 1950a).

At the height of the 1950 raids, the UAW International Executive Board levied a special assessment of one dollar per week for 12 weeks to fund these actions. In response, the four FE presidents of Chicago Harvester Locals 101, 107, 108, 141, together with the FE Local 139 (Ingersoll Steel in Chicago) president, issued a leaflet calling upon the Melrose Park workers to reject the Executive Board's request (HYC, [1950a], [1950b]).

According to the leaflet, the UAW assigned 30 to 40 organizers, including Local 6 officials Moss and Dahlke, in their attempted raids of Harvester's West Pullman plant (FE Local 107), Tractor Works (FE Local 101), and Ingersoll Steel (FE Local 139). Besides calling for the withholding of financing earmarked for these raids, the FE local presidents appealed to Local 6 members, arguing that all Harvester workers would benefit from the two unions uniting to combat Harvester during the 1950 contract negotiations in obtaining decent pensions and pay increases (HYC, [1950b]).

Even after the UAW's unsuccessful raid at Tractor Works in 1950, at the initiation of FE Local 101, Local 6 and Local 101 representatives met in April 1951 in order "to unite against Harvester" (DRP, 1951, 4). This proposed unity between the two locals experiencing similar problems was, at best, tenuous and short-lived. By August 1952, the two locals were once more at each other's throats during their respective strikes (DRP, 1951, 4; HYC, 1951b; UAWL6OC, 1952b).

### *Local 6's 1952 Production Standards Strike*

The stage was set for UAW Local 6's production standards strike when Harvester slashed both piecework prices and occupational classifications in 1951 and 1952. Local 6 responded by conducting nine wildcat strikes between March and May 1951. Although tensions between Harvester and Local 6 eased during the summer, in the fall of 1951 Harvester resumed its attack. This led to another wave of wildcat strikes, commencing in February 1952 and lasting throughout the spring.

Because of these continuing problems, 90% of Local 6's membership voted to authorize a strike on May 4. The local delayed calling a

walkout due to layoffs in June as well as an early July plant shutdown, caused by the nationwide steel strike (UAWL6NC, 1952a; UAWL6NC, 1952b). On August 3, Local 6 decided to strike Harvester, because of the steel strike's conclusion and a reduction in the company's inventory (UAWL6NC, 1952c; UAWL6NC, 1952d).

The strike, which began on August 4, was the only work stoppage that Local 6 led against Harvester concerned solely with production standards, and that occurred during a contract. In fact, it was the first time in the United States that any trade union legally struck a major corporation over production standards, both piecework and day work, when a collective bargaining agreement was in effect (UAW-CIO, Local 6, 1952). Furthermore, the strike was significant because it overlapped with the FE's walkout.

While the FE's strike resulted in a resounding defeat for the union, Local 6's work stoppage ended in a decisive, albeit temporary, victory for the Melrose Park workers. According to Ozanne (1967, 219), although the company had anticipated the FE's walkout, Local 6's strike, the only one in the UAW-Harvester chain, caught the company by surprise. In fact, he argues, Harvester's strategy was based on maintaining production at their UAW facilities while it took on the FE in an all-out battle. Norm Roth believes that Harvester had no choice but to resolve its strike with Local 6, considering that the company's main objective was to break the FE work stoppage (Roth, 1989c).

However, the rivalry between the two unions had become so bitter that once Local 6 had concluded its strike, Local 6 members agitated in front of the three Chicago FE plants, calling for the union to end its walkout. According to Norm Roth:

And we then, UAW guys were appearing, at the gates of the Harvester plants where FE was on strike and sayin' that these guys aren't on strike for a legitimate strike. . . . That these guys are just out to destroy the economy. These guys are Communists and such, you know. And eventually they . . . helped the company break that strike. (Roth, 1989c.)

### *The Harvester-*FE* Strike of 1952*

In June 1952, the UAW launched an unsuccessful raid against FE Local 108 at Harvester's McCormick Works in Chicago (Gilpin,

1989, 48–9). With the increased hostility between the UAW and the FE, Harvester had steeled itself to engage the FE in an all-out struggle, counting on the UAW to help weaken the FE's strike (Roth, 1989c).

The FE strike, beginning on August 21, 1952, involved approximately 30,000 workers in eight Harvester plants. Using the same tactics that Harvester used in Local 6's work stoppage, the company kept its plants open and conducted a vigorous back-to-work campaign: barrages of mail to strikers' homes, visits by foremen to employees' houses, and newspaper advertisements calling for workers to cross the picket lines (NA, n.d.(b); Gilpin, 1989, 51).

Harvester took advantage of the anti-Communist fervor sweeping the country to sway public opinion against the FE. The company placed advertisements in the Chicago newspapers emphasizing the intimate connection between the FE leaders and the CPUSA. In addition, Chicago newspapers ran articles concerning the "reds" that controlled the FE. Another devastating blow to the union occurred when the House Un-American Activities Committee arrived in Chicago a mere two weeks into the walkout, "to investigate communism in Chicago unions" (NA, n.d.(b); Gilpin, 1989, 51).

Despite the strike's violent nature, by the end of the first week in November workers had crossed the picket lines in all eight plants, from a high of 65.1% (Richmond Works) to a low of 20.3% (Tractor Works). With the work stoppage disintegrating at an astonishingly rapid rate, Gerald Fielde, the FE Secretary-Treasurer, ended the strike on November 15, by signing a contract that totally capitulated to Harvester on all of the union's original demands (NA, n.d.(b), 29–33; Gilpin, 1989, 51).

#### *The Demise of the FE, 1953–1955*

The FE's disastrous strike only emboldened the UAW in its raids on the beleaguered union. The Local 6 leadership, composed of the Reutherite PAC, continued to hammer away at the FE in the local's newspaper and took an active part in these raids. Without acknowledging its role in helping to sabotage the strike, several days after the FE's capitulation the Local 6 leadership attacked both the company (for its greed and "union busting") and compared the FE leaders to one of the most conservative sections of capital. The Local 6 leaders claimed that the FE leadership "has no more right to function in the

capacity of Union Leadership than does the National Association of Manufacturers" (UAWL6OC, 1952a). Without acknowledging the significant role that red-baiting had played in undermining the strike, the PAC stated the FE's defeat occurred for one major reason:

The leaders of F.E. lost the confidence of their membership because they followed the twists and turns of the Communist Party. They have settled for inferior agreements to retain their grip on the Union. The result was inevitable. When the strike came this year, the Company took the offensive. They increased their demands on the Union as the strike continued, right down to the end on Sunday. (UAWL6OC, 1952a.)

However, the Local 6 leadership's "theory" of why the FE lost its walkout was invalidated by the subsequent outcomes of the UAW's unsuccessful raids. Although the UAW consciously selected FE plants with the strongest "back-to-work movements," workers voted to retain the FE by a two-to-one margin at the Richmond (Indiana) plant and three-to-one at the West Pullman plant (Chicago). Realizing that it had no chance at the Farmall (Rock Island, Illinois) plant, the UAW dropped out just two days before the NLRB election (Ozanne, 1967, 215–216).

In spite of the FE's success in these post-strike raids, problems first surfaced in two Harvester plants in western Illinois' Quad Cities in mid-August 1953. At the East Moline and Rock Island facilities, the workers conducted membership referendums and voted to disaffiliate from the FE and expressed considerable interest in joining the UAW. Local 6 leaders viewed these developments quite optimistically and there is indirect evidence that the Local 6 leadership actively promoted UAW affiliation (UAWL6OC, 1953a).

The East Moline NLRB representation election, held on May 26, 1954, led to the first irreparable crack in the FE Harvester chain when the production and maintenance workers voted 1326 to 311 to affiliate with the UAW. In the Tool Room, the results were even more lopsided with the FE obtaining only 17 votes to the 81 votes of the IAM–AFL (Machinists) and the UAW's 124 votes. In an article reporting the UAW's victory in *The Union Voice*, the Local 6 leaders expressed their pleasure, and took a parting shot at the FE organizers active during their successful raid: "The propaganda at Moline during the campaign this past few weeks featured some of the most vicious lies

about conditions existing at Melrose Park. But whoever heard of the communist party (sic) telling the truth about anything, anywhere" (UAWL6OC, 1954a; UAWL6OC, 1953a; UAWL6OC, 1953b; UAWL6OC, 1954b).

However, the UAW raids were not the FE's only worries at this time. With McCarthyism still in full force, the remaining independent leftist trade unions were confronted with the Communist Control Act of 1954, which granted the Attorney General the authority to use the Subversive Activities Control Board to decree that a union was controlled by Communists, thus depriving it of National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) protection. In addition, if a mere 20% of a Communist-controlled union's members demanded a representation election, the union could reorganize under new non-Communist leadership and still retain its contract and have access to both the NLRA and the NLRB (Levenstein, 1981, 314).

After East Moline's defection, other Harvester locals continued to disaffiliate from the FE and join the UAW; the Farmall plant was the next to leave. The movement expanded to the Chicago Harvester facilities, and finally to all FE plants (Ozanne, 1967, 219–220; UAWL6OC, 1955a).

While Gilpin (1989, 59) argues that the FE leaders separated from the UE prior to the 1955 Harvester negotiations because of their belief that the company would once again seek to destroy the union, this disaffiliation came about as a result of the union's loss in UAW raids and the FE leaders' inability to staunch the union's hemorrhaging. At the end of January 1955, a committee of five top-level FE officers met with a comparable committee of UAW representatives, which included Local 6 Shop Committee chairman Seymour Kahan. This meeting, called under the guise of achieving unity between the two unions during the upcoming negotiations, however, was little more than a way for the FE leaders to see what they could get from the UAW for bringing their members, as a group, into the union. The UAW argued that the most appropriate method for "bring(ing) to all IHC employees the things they justly deserve" was to have all FE-represented employees join the UAW while stating that raids of FE plants would continue until "complete organic unity" had been achieved (UAWL6OC, 1955b).

In the middle of March 1955, the FE Harvester Conference Board voted for disaffiliation from the UE and decided to join the UAW as

a group. In exchange for the FE delivering its locals to the UAW, the auto union agreed to retain the former FE staff representatives, except for President Grant Oakes and Secretary–Treasurer Gerald Fielde. In the subsequent NLRB representation elections held in the former FE Harvester plants in May and June 1955, the UAW won all elections over the rival AFL unions and the “no union” choice by decisive margins (Ozanne, 1967, 219–220; UAWL6OC, 1955a; Selekman, *et al.*, 1958, 622).

According to Joe Valenti, a former FE Local 101 (Tractor Works) official, when his local joined the UAW in 1955, the red-baiting ceased and the UAW leaders’ attitude had changed:

[When] the same leaders that were in the FE–UE went to the UAW, we were not tagged anymore as Communists, believe it or not. . . . The union affiliation made us good guys, you know, more or less. (Valenti, 1989.)

### *Conclusion*

Although I have demonstrated the active role that Local 6’s Shachtmanite leadership played in the FE’s destruction, I do not claim that the FE would not have been absorbed by the UAW if Local 6 had not adopted this role. However, if Local 6 had united with the Chicago-area FE locals in battling Harvester, it certainly would have been more difficult for the UAW International to eliminate the FE. As discussed in this article, there were undoubtedly other obstacles besides its rivalry with the UAW that threatened the union’s survival.

In 1946, the WP, driven by virulent anti-Communism, was drawn to a seemingly militant, yet increasingly anti-Communist Reuther. As the UAW leader further tightened his hegemony over the union, the Shachtmanites came to view Reuther as the best that the U. S. trade union movement could offer, with the union’s most progressive, non-Communist elements located in the Reuther Caucus. At this time, the WP/ISL discarded the idea of organizing an independent left-wing opposition within the UAW, deeming that it would be futile to oppose Reuther.

By 1949, because of the Shachtmanites’ rabid anti-Communism, their main goal became the elimination of the FE rather than advocating the building of an independent militant rank-and-file movement, thus leading to the group’s total capitulation before the Reuther bu-

reaucracy. And as the ISL auto unionists became completely entrenched in the Reuther Caucus, many of them deserted the Shachtmanites for UAW staff positions. In the mid-1950s, Michael Harrington, a Shachtmanite Young Socialist League organizer, noted this when he came across many former WP/ISL members while visiting Detroit. Quipped Harrington: “By that point there was a joke going around the UAW staff that the best way to become a union bureaucrat was to join the Shachtmanites. Reuther made a point of coopting his opposition as fast as he possibly could, so with a couple of articles to your credit in *Labor Action* you were a likely candidate to be appointed to UAW staff” (Isserman, 1987, 228).

The support of “progressive” trade union leaders was merely a way station for the increasingly rightward-drifting Shachtmanites. By the late 1960s, they were virulent backers of the Vietnam War and the conservative administration of AFL–CIO President George Meany, whom they viewed as representing the U. S. working class’ true and best interests. Although they had become active in Democratic Party politics by the early 1960s, the Shachtmanites could not stomach backing liberal Democrat George McGovern in the 1972 presidential election, believing that he was too soft on Communism (Drucker, 1994, 286–311). And in the 1980s, a number of aging Shachtmanites comfortably ensconced in the Social Democrats USA had found positions in Reagan’s administration (Wald, 1987, 328).

Nevertheless, this story of the Shachtmanites, who controlled UAW Local 6 and guided the local in activities that were directed at destroying one of the few remaining U. S. left-wing unions, demonstrates the obvious lesson that left-wing anti-Communism is more destructive than right-wing anti-Communism, because it pits workers against workers within the unions. Even though the Shachtmanites still considered themselves to be of the left, and believed that they were fighting for the workers’ best interests, in reality they ended up giving tacit support to capital. In the final analysis, their intense anti-Communism came to dominate their entire political program and resulted in the group abandoning its fight for the workers’ independent interests with regards to the trade union leadership. This ideology helped transform the Shachtmanites from an extreme left-wing tendency to a right-wing group over the next two decades.

Perhaps another important lesson can be learned from this cold-war struggle. Even though leftists will have to compromise at times

by aligning with progressive (or not so progressive) trade union leaders, it is inherently dangerous for them to abandon their programs for that of the union bureaucracy. Once alliances are made, no matter how progressive the union leadership is, there is pressure on left-wing activists to becoming co-opted, rather than viewing such a coalition from a tactical viewpoint. Under such circumstances, they should continue to build an independent support base among rank-and-file workers, rather than relying on union leaders. Unfortunately, this is a lesson that the Shachtmanites failed to learn.

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Many of the citations in this paper contain archival sources that can be found in one of the six following research libraries and archives: The Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan; Tamiment Library, New York University, New York, New York; Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois; Labor-Management Documentation Center, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York; Northwestern University Special Collections Reading Room, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois; and Navistar Archives, Chicago, Illinois. In addition, relevant material was obtained at the UAW Local 6 office, 3520 W. North Avenue, Stone Park, Illinois. The author thanks the staff at these libraries, archives and the UAW Local 6 office for their help during his research visits.

CCC. Charles Chiakulas Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Detroit.  
CSPC. Carl Shier Private Collection, Chicago, Illinois.  
DRP. David Rothstein Papers, Chicago Historical Society.  
HYC. Holgate Young Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Detroit.  
LMDC. Labor-Management Documentation Center, Ithaca, New York.  
MGC. Martin Glaberman Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Detroit.  
MSC. Max Shachtman Collection, Tamiment Library, New York.  
NA. Navistar Archives, Chicago.  
NUSCRR. Northwestern University Special Collections Reading Room, Evanston, Illinois.  
UAWL6C. UAW Local 6 Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Detroit.  
UAWL6NC. UAW Local 6 Newspaper Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Detroit.  
UAWL6OC. UAW Local 6 Office Collection, UAW Local 6 Office, Stone Park, Illinois.  
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