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Corn Strike History Report

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Augustana College



Corn Strike History Report

Fall 2015 • Sustainable Working Landscapes Initiative

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The Sustainable Working Landscapes Initiative (SWLI)

The concept of the Upper Mississippi Center for Sustainable Communities (UMC) came from exploratory meetings with more than 125 on and off-campus community stakeholders between January and August of 2013. The need was clear: our area's urban and rural communities have identified many environmental and economic sustainability issues and do not have the staff, expertise, time or funding to address them. The vision of the UMC was to mobilize Augustana's faculty and students to help communities solve the social, economic, and environmental challenges facing the rural and urban landscapes of the Upper Mississippi region by integrating the study of these current, local issues into coursework taught on campus. After two pilot years, the UMC implemented a unique collaborative learning model named the Sustainable Working Landscapes Initiative.

The Sustainable Working Landscapes Initiative is modeled after the Sustainable Cities Year Program at the University of Oregon. Augustana College is the only exclusively undergraduate institution in the country to adapt this highly successful program to a residential liberal arts setting. The model creates a full one-year partnership between Augustana and a city/county partner, matching existing courses from multiple departments and other learning experiences (independent study, senior inquiry, internships) with community-identified and driven sustainability problems. The SWLI also helps cities and counties achieve their economic, social, and environmental sustainability goals while working with limited resources.

The Sustainable Working Landscapes Initiative represents a paradigm shift for service learning experiences in higher education. Instead of asking groups and communities to participate in initiatives that originate in academia, the UMC asks communities to identify their most pressing social, economic, and sustainability challenges. It then provides these groups and communities with the human and academic resources of Augustana College faculty and students to help them address the challenges. This is not a one-time group of volunteers. SWLI student and faculty participants commit to supplying three, 10 week terms of sustained research, study and work in the classroom and in the field. The UMC is establishing enduring relationships between Augustana and these constituents so they can continue to work together to find creative solutions, test and evaluate their effectiveness, and try again as challenges and problems change.

The Mississippi River city of Clinton, Iowa (pop. 26,473) was chosen as Augustana's 2015-16 SWLI partner. Students and faculty are collaborating with Clinton officials and community stakeholders to complete 15 community-identified projects. Throughout the year,

these projects are being worked on by 150 students in 15 courses in the humanities, social, and natural sciences. Because these projects are community-driven priorities, the fresh ideas, designs and products students generate address critical but unmet needs and have real-world impact.

Project Description

History students will collaborate with the Clinton Public Library and community stakeholders to complete a comprehensive history of the Clinton Corn Company Strike of 1979-1980. Students will research primary and secondary literature as well as complete 30-40 oral histories of individuals involved in the strike. Then the students will draft a final report that brings together the entire project and describes the history of the strike including its lead-up and aftermath that integrates the information and perspectives from the oral histories and historical research.

The Trinity: Consumerism, Corn & Clinton

The crossroads of consumer culture and labor unions in Clinton, Iowa

– As seen through the 1979/1980 Clinton Corn Strike

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HIST 482 – Research Tutorial (SI)

Dr. Calder

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Part I

Introduction

From the residential streets to the corn fields that span forever, Clinton, Iowa seems to be a quiet community. A stereotypical Corn Belt town, it sits nestled between the banks of the Mississippi river and the fertile cornfields of Iowa. Driving into the city, the atmosphere of Clinton begins to take hold; acres upon acres of fertile fields roll to meet the nearby river, creating an image of natural abundance. Scattered amongst the uniform fields are aging trees; remnants of the landscape before agriculture as well as necessary barriers from high winds to anchor the soil - occasionally outfitted with a tire swing swaying in the breeze. These fields bend and slope with the hills defining the landscape, as if each rolling hill is desperate to meet the Mississippi river. Soon, the corn fields fade to shops and homes where residential and commercial life mix together along cobblestone streets, leaking pieces of Clinton's history. Boundaries of old and new blossom from distressed swatches of cobble stone under pavement - where dents from carriages fade to ford tire tracks. However, the nostalgia from decades past quickly fades as the structural remnants of Clinton's glory days are now seen with toys strewn across front yards and chain-fence gates blocking out unwanted visitors. With the meshing of old and new it becomes clear that Clinton has changed over the decades, but the reason for why appears unclear.

Apart from the residential neighborhoods, quaint main street and rolling corn fields, there is one aspect of Clinton that cannot be neglected. Dominating the landscape of Clinton, is an impressive, industrial structure –



Figure 1: ADM corn-storage facility. "The Golden Dome."

Photo from Quad City Times

The Archer, Daniels, Midland plant (ADM.) Previously known as the Clinton Corn Processing Company, it is a staggeringly large complex of buildings situated on the bank of the Mississippi. Steam billows from it's smokestacks as sunlight strikes it's brilliantly gold-domed storage facility.¹ As its shadow looms over the city and its sulfuric aroma penetrates the noses of passers-by there is an active buzz caused by the constant noise of trains, ships, semi-trucks and thousands of employees bustling in and out of its gates every day – penetrating the sleepy façade of the town. This structure is vital to Clinton's economic survival and its impact on the city is great and ever-changing.

Over the last century, Clinton, like the rest of the nation has seen many industrial and economic changes. The twentieth century was dominated by the growth of consumer culture which dramatically changed the national economy and the consumer's way of life – as well as the dominance of labor-unions in the work place. The correlation between consumerism and labor unions is somewhat apparent at a superficial level – however the two become greatly intertwined in the city of Clinton. For Clinton, and many other cities across the country, the ever-changing economy of the twentieth century created a relationship between the increase of consumer culture and the weakening power of the labor union. In this unstable economic environment, the adaptability of companies and their workforces is vital; however, as the graphical lines of consumer culture and labor unions intersected a period of turmoil struck throughout the nation in the 1970s and 1980s. The struggle to cope with this change in the economic environment is perfectly exemplified by the Clinton Corn Strike of 1979/1980.

¹ Cook, Jeff. "A coal storage facility at the ADM plant in Clinton" *Quad-City Times*

Background

From Lumber to Corn

Once known as the “lumber capital of the world” Clinton, Iowa played a vital role in both the lumber industry and the expansion of the American West.² German and English immigrants, arriving in the quad cities came to Clinton for the fertile farm land surrounding the Mississippi and for the

lumber industry, where timber from up north was shipped down to Clinton for cutting and refining³. After the Second World War, Clinton’s lumber industry declined and Clinton’s economy followed suit. As a result, the community dove into economic decline with a lack of resources and job opportunities.

Corn and the American Dream- The Company

The twentieth century contains some of the most revolutionary decades of the modern era. It is defined with many terms – capitalism, communism, feminism, Nazism, federalism and even nationalism. However, the leading –ism of the twentieth century is perhaps consumerism – changing the way America and the world went about its business. At the turn of the century the earliest hints of



Figure 2: Lumber in Clinton
Photo from Clinton Historical Society

² Fantasia, Rick. “Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers.” *University of California Press*, pp.180–275. (p. 181)

³ Fantasia, p. 181

the consumer century began seeping in, and then the consumer revolution hit full-force, penetrating every town in the country. Clinton, Iowa was amongst the many Midwest towns hit by the wave of the consumer revolution. This wave sparked a change in Clinton that would redefine its industry and its way of life.

With new times, came new industry. Suddenly, the lumber production that had built Clinton, which earned it a place on the map, was disappearing as the demand for lumber plummeted. In search of a desirable product to replace lumbar in the Clinton economy, the town turned to sugar refinement. So on April 22, 1907 the Clinton Sugar Refining Company opened its gates, ready for business. At first the company only employed 250 men, and used about three-thousand bushels of corn daily to produce corn sugar products. With its access to rail and river traffic, strong supply of corn and access to clean water, made Clinton the greatest corn market west of Chicago.⁴ With the wave of consumerism sweeping the country, the demand for corn syrup increased exponentially with every processed food brand using the cheap sweetener for their food products. So for the first sixteen years of the company's existence, its sole product was corn syrup – primarily used for sweetening candy products.⁵

Clinton Corn Processing also went through countless name changes to fit its products. By 1920, the name of the plant was changed to the Clinton Corn Syrup Refining company to better reflect its primary product.⁶ However, as the demand for corn syrup as well as other corn byproducts such as corn starch increased. The name of the company was changed only thirteen years later in 1933 to better reflect the market of the company. This time the company was officially known as The Clinton Company, whose workers called it the “Sugar House.”⁷ This name, again, only lasted thirteen

⁴ Clinton County Historical Society. 2011. *From the Clinton Sugar Refining Company to ADM: A Pictorial History of a Local Company in Clinton, IA*. Clinton, Iowa: Clinton County Historical Society, p.6

⁵ Clinton County Historical Society, 2011, p.11

⁶ Clinton County Historical Society, 2011, p.11

years, when the name was changed to The Clinton Industries Company in 1946, then to Clinton Foods, Inc. But by 1950 to, once again, better reflect the true output of the company and its products which now included food, fuel and feed grade corn products changed its name again.⁸ Finally, in 1956 the name of the company was finalized to the Clinton Corn Processing Company, Inc. – A name that has become well known to current residents of Clinton. The name of the company was chosen to reflect the City it was associated with.⁹ The plant was adapting and changing to the product it was producing. “This adaption” would become a strategy for CCPC as union and management relations spoiled.

Industry Competition

A merger made in 1929, from of Fleischman Company a producer of dry granulated yeast, the Royal Baking Company the largest producer of baking powder in the United States, and the E.W. Gillett Company who produced both baking powder and yeast cakes along with perfumed lye. Combined, they made Standard Brands Incorporated (SBI)¹⁰. Clinton Corn Processing Company was made from their merger a decade later; its responsibility was to create corn syrup on a commercial scale for both domestic and industrial use¹¹. During the late 50’s to 70’s the Clinton Branch of Standard Brands Incorporated was one of three factories that specialized in creating this syrup for the whole of the United States, making Clinton Corn a “cash cow” for Standard Brands.¹²

As the demand for corn and corn products increased SBI expanded its influence and more factories like Clinton corn were built. In addition, SBI recognized Clinton’s value with its vast

⁷ Clinton County Historical Society, 2011, p.17

⁸ Clinton County Historical Society, 2011, p.25

⁹ Clinton County Historical Society, 2011, p.29

¹⁰ Birecree, Adreinne M. “Chapter 3: Strike and Decertification at Clinton Corn Products.” Edited by Charles Craypo and Bruce Nissen. *Grand Designs: The Impact of Corporate Strategies on Workers, Unions, and Communities*, pp.45–64. (p.46)

¹¹ Fantasia, p.182

¹² Fantasia, p.182

expanses of fertile farmland¹³. The as CCPC grew it created jobs for of the Clinton's citizen's employing both salaried and hourly workers. The city's population exploded as the company expanded as High Fructose corn syrup demand sky rocketed. High fructose corn syrup is used as a sweetener in food, which replaced beat syrup and other artificial sweeteners as its popularity grew. By 1960, Clinton corn became the sole provider for corn syrup in the United States as high fructose corn syrup demand exploded¹⁴.

The Union

Through all the changes within the company during its first sixty years, it's not surprising the workers at Clinton Corn – like many labor workers around the nation – decided to form a union. Hourly workers banded together to create a coalition, subsequently making the Local 6 Grain Millers Union – founded in 1937.¹⁵ This union became an vital part of the Clinton Community and maintained solid communication between the plant workers and management. This relationship became vital to the stability of the company, and its development in 1937 is not surprising when looking the national labor union statistics. According to the Bureau for Labor Statistics (BLS,) which computes labor density from the Current Population Survey and bases this measure on the percentage wage and salary worker belonging to unions, the peak of union membership was reached in the late 1940s. This happened when national labor union membership was one-third of the national population.¹⁶ In line with the thesis, it is also important to note that union support peaked, and then began to decline. These findings are consistent with the timing of the 1979/1980 Clinton Corn Strike. (See Figure 3)

¹³ Fantasia, p.181

¹⁴ Fantasia, p. 183

¹⁵ Broadrick, Peg, Bill Dawes, Lori Dawes, Ellen Eckelberg, Rick Fantasia, Mike Krajanovich, Joan Legel, et al. n.d. *An Injury to One is An Injury to All - One Year of Our Lives: The Clinton Corn Strike 1979-1980*. Clinton, Iowa: Concerned Citizens.

¹⁶ Panagopoulous, Costas, and Peter L. Francia. 2008. "Polls Trends: Labor Unions in the United States." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 72 (1): 134-259. (p.135)

The Stock, the Ear and the Husk of the Problem

By examining an ear of corn one can determine that a single corn plant is made up of three main parts – the stock or stem on which the fruit grows, the ear of corn on which the cornels grow and the husk that cocoons the ear to protect it from the harsh natural elements. These three parts are unified as one – they have sprouted from the same seed and they are composed of the same DNA. However, each

Table 1. CPS/BLS: Are you a member of a labor union or of an employee association similar to a union?

Year	% of U.S. Workforce	Total Union Members
2005	13	15,685,000
2004	13	15,472,000
2002	13	16,146,000
2000	14	16,258,000
1998	14	16,211,000
1996	15	16,269,000
1994	16	16,748,000
1992	16	16,390,000
1990	16	16,740,000
1988	17	17,002,000
1986	18	16,975,000
1984	19	17,340,000
1982	22	19,571,000
1980	23	20,968,000
1978	25	21,756,000
1976	28	22,153,000
1974	28	22,165,000
1972	29	21,205,000
1970	30	20,990,000
1968	30	20,017,000
1966	30	18,922,000
1964	30	17,597,000
1962	30	16,893,000
1960	29	15,516,000
1958	30	15,570,000
1956	31	16,446,000
1954	32	15,808,000
1952	32	15,632,000
1950	32	14,294,000
1948	32	14,271,000

NOTE.—CPS/BLS, Current Population Survey/Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 3: Union membership. Panagopulious and Francia

part serves a unique function in regards to the whole and is clearly distinguishable from its counterparts.

It's in these same parts that Standard Brands and its subsidiary Clinton Corn, was organized. The company, as a whole, is equivalent to an entire corn plant. In this metaphor and each subcategory of workers represent the stock, ear and husk respectively. Each has their own functions, characteristics and unique qualities to carry out the function of the whole. The whole plant being Standard Brands, a conglomerate controlled by the J. P. Morgan fortune through the Morgan Guarantee Trust Bank of New York.¹⁷ The ear and husk combined being Clinton Corn company, the

husk surrounding the ear then becomes management at Clinton Corn. The ear is therefore the bulk of Clinton Corn's employees with each cornel of the Cobb representing one person within the whole.

Therefore, when the company is described in these terms, it is important that the various groups of people, just as parts of the plant work in harmony to create a healthy and thriving work environment – because when these parts do not work in harmony the plant cannot flourish. A breach of harmony is exactly what happened in the years leading up to the 1979/1980 strike at the Clinton Corn Company, according to many accounts recorded at the time of the strike. In a piece written by Rev. Gill Dawes of Clinton in the midst of the strike, he says “For those who are interested in finding the cause, the answer to that question has deep roots which ultimately are entwined with the essence of human nature itself... The immediate facts leading up to the strike are really an accumulation of resentments stemming from company policy and managerial methods going back to at least 1975.”¹⁸ Dawes is attributing the cause of upheaval in the company to various reasons, the greatest of which being a growing divide between the management and the workers – the slow creation of disharmony.

As with many companies in the twentieth century, workers at the Clinton Corn Company joined forces to create a labor union. The Local #6 Grain Workers Union strived to create a better, more harmonious workplace for unionized workers. In his piece, Rev. Dawes points out that although the union faced many challenges since its founding, including many wildcat strikes which averaged one a year¹⁹ –the tensions between the union and management had only become bitter in the years since 1975.²⁰

The Importance of 1975: Wildcat Strike

¹⁷ Broadrick, et al., p.1

¹⁸ Broadrick, et al., p.1

¹⁹ Davis, Interviewer: Merle. 1983. "Transcript of Interview of Joe Rajcevitch." Clinton, IA,

April 25. (p.17)

²⁰ Broadrick, et al., p.1

Through the process of collecting interviews, one year came up over and over again as a significant event in the lead up to the strike of 1979/1980. That year was 1975 a year of tense negotiations between the union and CCPC management. The Wildcat strike of 1975 appears to be the catalyst for the blowup that occurred four years later, it is important to understand the details of the event and the remnants it left behind. However, to fully understand the events of 1975, the history of the local #6 union must also be analyzed.

As previously stated, the Grain Millers International Union at Clinton Corn Processing Company (CCPC) formed an independent local union (local #6) and affiliated directly with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) as a federal local union with the National Council of Grain Processors as it's negotiating unit.²¹ At its peak, the local #6 represented more than 1,200 Clinton workers, but by 1979 membership had dropped to about 750 workers.²²

Over the years, local #6 developed a reputation for being among the strongest and most militant in the industry, an industry known for aggressive local labor unions, as well as maintaining internal solidarity and good relations with the Clinton community. It financed a full-time business agent, devised its own bargaining demands and carried out its own negotiating strategy – which made its wages were among the highest in the industry. In the 1970s its CCPC contracts included strong language to protect the sonority principals during layoffs and recalls to prohibit management from subcontracting work normally done by members of the union.²³ Then, to boost the union's ego even more, the union succeeded in negotiating reasonably coordinated contract expiration dates among the various corn-processing plants. This enabled them to “maximize their potential strike and bargaining power.”²⁴ Therefore during each round of industry bargaining, individual locals would try to exceed terms and conditions that had been agreed upon as acceptable to all the locals. According to Birecree,

²¹ Birecree, p.50

²² Birecree, p.50

²³ Birecree, p.51

²⁴ Birecree, p.51

local #6 often set the pattern in these bargaining rounds and eventually began to win 1-2 week strikes throughout the 1960s. This led to the union feeling that they could succeed with any strike attempt and therefore led to what an AFGM vice president called an “atmosphere of confrontation not negotiation.”²⁵ As a result, the local #6 began using wildcat strikes as a tactical weapon at the point of production.

Up until this point, the CCPC accepted industry settlement patterns without any resistance – this soothed plant labor relations in Clinton and perhaps led workers to believe that CCPC had abandoned all opposition to pattern bargaining, reconciling it to having a strong union represent its production workers.²⁶ If this was so, then the workers had a false grasp on the situation – because CCPC was not satisfied with the status quo and was taking steps to change it. The first sign of the company’s discontent could be seen in anti-collective bargaining literature that was distributed during a company-sponsored training program for foreman. This material alleged that unions and collective bargaining were responsible for inefficient production because they “inflated operating costs, imposed expensive and intrusive grievance procedures, and instigated periodic production stoppages.”²⁷ With this, union and management were at odds confrontation became inevitable. By 1975 CCPC delayed settlement of formal grievances. Then, as the grievances accumulated local #6 resorted to a lengthy arbitration to resolve them.²⁸

Members of local #6 called a wildcat strike following the firing of a union member for concealing a small light bulb in his lunch box as he left the plant. Workers walked off the job, violating their contracts – the strike lasted for two days and ended when the strikers returned under the impression that management had agreed not to retaliate against individual participants in the strike. This, however, turned out to be an incorrect assumption when CCPC informed the union that it

²⁵ Birecree, p.51

²⁶ Birecree, p.51

²⁷ Birecree, p.51

²⁸ Birecree, p.51

was considering disciplinary action against selected strikers.²⁹ In all, the incident caused the discharge of forty-five union members – including all but one member of Local #6’s executive board and its negotiating committee, and 130 other workers were fired and re-hired without sonority. It’s these actions and changes that signaled a more openly aggressive policy toward the Clinton Local #6 union.

Relationships between Unions and Corporations

Union and corporation relationships past and present are fundamentally different. Where pre-1940 union goals focused on what they could accomplish with the limited resources and powers they held. Unions following World War Two gained more legal power and focused on other matters. By that time union recognition, collective bargaining and labor-management contractual were legal, where unions before 1945 struggled to gain those benefits.³⁰ So unions in 1979 focused on other issues compared to unions in 1925. It was this difference that made union and corporate relations change.

The height of union power in Clinton was ending by the 1980s. The dynamic before World War Two, meant that the union was a bridge between management of staff with the corporate office. The union was a bridge to fight for higher wages, safe working conditions, and reasonable hours. They were well oiled cogs in a machine; they were compatible and worked together. Unions and corporations were partners, where the union soothed problems in the work place and was a bargaining chip with management.³¹ But by the 1970’s this wasn’t the case, especially for Clinton Corn and the local 6 union. By the start of the 1960’s unions found themselves under pressure from the corporate

²⁹ Birecree, p.51

³⁰ Rubin, Beth A. “CLASS STRUGGLE AMERICAN STYLE: UNIONS, STRIKES AND WAGES.” *American Sociology Review* 51, no. 5 (Oct. 86): 618–33. (p.618)

³¹ Clawson, Dan, and Clawson, Mary Ann. “WHAT HAS HAPPEND TO THE US LABOR MOVEMENT? Union Decline and Renewal.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (1999): 25–95. (p.75)

adversaries and unions became increasingly demanding in contract negotiations. Corporations and unions responded aggressively to failed negotiations. The window to negotiate shrank. Corporations were unwilling to bend to union demands as Mary Ann and Dan Clawson explains:

“Unions had lost their oppositional character, while capital valued the benefits conferred by a unionized workforce. This understanding has been shaken by events of the late 1970s and early 1980s, when corporate forces assumed a far more confrontational stance, and unions found themselves under relentless attack.”³²

Local 6 encountered the same. Both the union and CCPC were unwilling to bend to the other’s concessions which held harsher penalties for both the workers and the company. It got to the point where CCPC was demanding concessions from Local 6 that would dissolve it and Local 6 was demanding repercussions that would put thousands of new workers their jobs³³. Neither Local 6 nor CCPC wanted to the other to gain too much power.

Unions unwilling to change and update their “motives and methods to strike”

Local 6 and other unions across the nation were stuck. With CCPC and other corporations throughout the Midwest shifting their tactics to match aggressive strikes, it was tough to keep up³⁴. Therefore, despite several years of “successful wildcats,” Local 6 was unwilling to change its strategy. However, a changing dynamic of corporate management switching to aggressive tactics, spelled disaster for Local 6 Union. As Stanley Aronowitz explains:

³² Clawson. 1999, p. 97

³³ Birecree, p.54

³⁴ Dixon, Marc. “Movements. Countermovement’s and Policy Adoption: The Case of Right-to-Work Activism.” *Social Forces* 87, no. 1 (September 2008): 473–499. (p.475)

“They have been passive in the face of dramatic changes in the economy, which have visited hardship on a considerable portion of the workers, and accepted the indifference of the political class to their problems. Their explicit commitment to the existing setup, particularly to the capitalist economic system, and to a perverse version of class peace, have put most of them in a dependent and defensive position. . . . Seventy-five years after the New Deal, organized labor has become a set of institutions that see nothing on the furthest horizon but the preservation of the New Deal’s withered remains on the one hand, and on the other the all-but-eclipsed promise that workers can achieve higher living standards through collective bargaining.”³⁵

Collective bargaining had worked for the union so many times before; it saw no reason to change tactics. Many onlookers who remember the Clinton Corn strike of 1979-80, give different opinions for why the union stuck to its “collective bargaining” guns. Some say lack of leadership but others mention the subtle shadow of SBI who loomed over the conflict. By 1960, SBI needed an upgrade and After World War 2 SBI reviewed its programs, attempting to adapt to a changing consumer culture and economic sphere³⁶. Clinton Corn Processing was due for a change, to revitalize its worth and make more than marginal profits. Local 6, with constant wildcat strikes, collective bargaining, and occasional walk offs cost CCPC and SBI more than a couple thousand dollars. So CCPC changed its bargaining tactics at the expense of Local 6. It was a sure fire way to either dissolve or decrease the unions control over CCPC, thus saving SBI time, resources, and money³⁷.

³⁵ Aronowitz, Stanly. “The Death and Life of American Labor.” *Social Policy* 44, no. 4 (winter 2014): 49–59. (p.49-51)

³⁶ (Myers & Jacobs 2014 p.56)

³⁷ Martin, Andrew W. and Dixon, Marc. “Changing to Win? Threat, Resistance, and the Role of Unions in Strikes.” *American Journal of Sociology* 116, no. 1 (July 2010): 93–129. (pp.96-98)

Part II

Oral Histories

The experience

The strike is hard to explain. When confronted by the sheer amount of information, just from interviews alone, the strike twists into complicated patterns. Each pattern is created by a different person, adding their perspective to the strike. But the strike and its impact on Clinton can't be described like a quilt; it's too real, too vivid. However, it is a useful metaphor when understanding the complexity of the communities' experience. A quilt is not a quilt if it's made of a single piece of cloth. It takes different shapes and different colors to make the pattern; a pattern that could take years to complete. This metaphor, in a way, does clarify the importance of these oral histories, carefully gathered to tell some individual stories of the strike. The strike, like a quilt, is too complex to be seen in only one perspective. The community, the company, and union had their leaders, but they cannot represent their followers as a whole. The experience of each member is different, and their memories of the strike cannot be represented with a single voice. The head of the union experienced different symptoms compared to a salaried worker, a civilian unrelated to the strike, or even another union member. Ultimately, each person was trying to survive in the changing times of consumerism- most workers stuck with the union tactics they knew, while CCPC changed to accommodate the new national consumer economy. Union workers continued to use their tried and true bargaining tactics; frustratingly unaware that "times had changed".

Below are personal stories of the strike.

The Leader: Mike Krajnovich

Michael "Mike" Krajnovich was a leader. He was the president of Local #6, fresh from union board elections. He stepped up to the plate after the previous board members for the union were fired and became the only member with leadership experience left to lead the strike.³⁸ Mr. Krajnovich watched as union and CCPC management relations crumbled, as an electrician and treasure on the board. He was not a part of the previous wildcats of 1969, 70, and 71.³⁹ His goal for the strike was to

³⁸ Davis, Merle. 1982 "Transcript of Interview of Mike Krajnovich." Clinton, IA, June 22. (p.50)

succeed and not have his union chapter decertified. However, that posed a challenge for him, as previous tactics of collective bargaining and contract renewal failed time and time again⁴⁰. He was a leader sticking to what he knew – tactics that had worked in the past; however, he was unsure of how to adapt to a new consumer culture.

When Mr. Krajnovich was elected president of the Local 6 union, the union was on the verge of striking. He believed leadership from the previous board was poor; they would threaten wildcat strikes, or call impromptu meetings. When people would show up no one knew what the meeting was for but, no one questioned it. “It wasn’t reported” Mr. Krajnovich explained taking about these urgent meetings⁴¹. Calling “Odeon” meetings, Mr. Krajnovich called them were the best bargaining chip Local 6 had, where if a meeting was mentioned by the board, management would do whatever they could to compromise⁴². It was all to keep the plant running. When the call to strike went out Mike Krajnovich took his place as leader- all to keep the union running. It was a tough position to be in, and when the CCPC was unwilling to concede and punishments for strikers and the union became harsher, the job was hard to bare.⁴³

As violence erupted between corporation and union, violent acts of riots and vandalism became common, Krajnovich denied the actions made by strikers, stating that they were basically acting on their own, without the board’s support.⁴⁴ After violence broke out and “melees” took place, involving police and strike members, Krajnovich described how his house was the victim of a drive by shooting.⁴⁵ With so many acts of violence reported concerning the strike, few of the newsletter

³⁹ Davis. 1982, p. 37-38

⁴⁰ Cahalan, Steve. “Peaceful Labor Parade by 2,000.” *Clinton Herald*.

⁴¹ Davis. 1982, p. 37-38

⁴² Davis. 1982, p. 37-38

⁴³ Birecree, p.58

⁴⁴ Davis. 1982, p. 72-73

⁴⁵ Beverly Geber. “2 Arrested, 17 Injured in Clinton Strike Flare-up: Continued from Page 1.” *Clinton*

articles were peaceful. However, one article in particular stood out; where strikers made a peaceful parade, led by Krajnovich himself.⁴⁶ It was the only article to describe a peaceful protest, relief can be read in the title, like it was the only time the strike wasn't a mix of angry voices screaming and action on revenge. Despite violence exhibited by both strikers and CCPC sympathizers, Krajnovich and the board used the same old bargaining tactics - relying on outside sources of donations and support from other unions across the Midwest and the Nation⁴⁷

A Strike Breaker: Carl Nord

When striking, many members of the union found themselves in financial crisis, especially when both spouses were committed to the unions cause. The same could be said for a single pension household, where Clinton corn was their sole source of income. As weeks turned to months pantries had little to store and bills grew hungry and piled up, unpaid. Despite the financial burden, union worker Carl Nord knew that the strike was going no-where and lost faith. With the burden to feed his family too great, Carl crossed the fence.

Strikers were faced with unemployment until the strike broke and without an income, many were unable to wait it out. So some broke the oath, dropped their signs, and crossed the fence. They needed to feed their families, send their kids to school, and have a roof over their heads. This became a risky business, when riots broke out in front of the factory's gates to intimidate strike breakers and scare newly hired workers.⁴⁸



Figure 4: Annie Urbanczyk interviews Carl Nord

Herald.
⁴⁶ Cahalan, Steve. "Peaceful Labor Parade b

⁴⁷ Davis. 1982, p. 72-75

However, banging on car windows and threats weren't the only worry for strike breakers; the threat of vandalism was another concern. Vandalism spread throughout the community; cars were keyed and bricks were thrown through windows during the night⁴⁹. Both strikers and supporters of the company used vandalism as a form of intimidation, even committing crimes of mistaken identity – such as keying the wrong car.⁵⁰

There were even instances of kidnapping and petty larceny – for example one case of a Molotov cocktail failing to detonate as Mr. Nord and his son were getting into their car (one of the many incidents he describes.) There was even a case of kidnapping, where the secretary of Clinton corn was abducted by a group of strike breakers. The kidnappers attempted to turn the strike in their favor, by using the secretary to give them information about the company. When she refused, she reported being slapped⁵¹. She returned relatively unharmed and informed police of the incident.

Family ties were also strained by financial burdens; Mr. Nord, for instance, was kicked out of his home by his father. His father was a striker and couldn't condone his son's decision to cross the picket line - father and son didn't reconcile until a decade later⁵². Despite family turmoil, it was lack of leadership and concern that the union was acting in an ineffective way that made Mr. Nord lose faith with the strike. Times had changed, what the union was asking for and how it was asking for it was taking too long and seemingly getting nowhere. He couldn't keep up with a union, whose unknowingly outdated tactics weren't working in the face of a changing consumer economy.

Law Enforcement Officer Lester Shields

⁴⁸ Davis. 1982, p. 66

⁴⁹ Geber, Beverly. "Clinton Corn Strike: Vandalism Victims." *Clinton Herald*.

⁵⁰ Geber, Beverly. "Striking Clinton Employee Charged with Kidnapping." *Clinton Herald*.

⁵¹ Geber, Beverly. "Striking Clinton Employee Charged with Kidnapping."

⁵² Urbanczyk, Anna. 2015. "Video of Interview of Carl Nord." Clinton, IA. October 7.

Lester Shields was a part of the strike, but he was not on a side of the action. Unlike reporters from *The Clinton Herald*, the local Clinton paper, Mr. Shields did not have a camera nor was he a reporter asking questions and watching behind the lines. Mr. Shields was a police officer, often stationed in front of the plant's gates where he watched strikers behind an invisible line drawn over black pavement. He is a third party, unrelated to the *Clinton Herald*, who was at the front-lines of the action, always watching, listening, and sometimes stopping strike activity. Mr. Shields was front and center to the conflict which swallowed his home town. He stood at mouth of the conflict, where one party clashed with the other. But after watching the strike evolve as seasons changed, Mr. Shield's belief faltered.⁵³

Like Carl Nord, he was an avid supporter of Local 6, reason being was his occupation. As a police officer and a member of a union himself, Mr. Shield's felt like it was his duty to support the local 6.⁵⁴ He sympathized with the strikers who were picketing in front of CCPC's gates. But as time passed, his loyalties changed. He had to place his career before his own personal beliefs. He was loyal to the force first before the union and CCPC. But like Mr. Nord, after watching months pass with little change in negotiations, his loyalties changed from supporting the union to the strikers.

As stated above, the strike became violent and police officers were kept around the clock to keep the peace. When the strike became violent the first ones called weren't the gazette, but the police; when violence brook out in front of the factory, officers and squad cars were called in to stop the violence from getting out of control⁵⁵. Strikers were surrounding and pounding on car doors and windows to strike breakers and newly hired workers who were trying to clock in for work. There were constant squabbles between police and strikers, with many strikers believing that the police force was corrupt and was bought by SBI.⁵⁶ Mr. Shields argued that as false, but agreed that one

⁵³ Wright, Clair. 2015. "Video Interview of Lester Shields." Clinton, IA. October.

⁵⁴ Wright, 2015

⁵⁵ Wright, 2015

incident could have sparked the rumors for corruption or bribery. When the strike became increasingly violent, the police were brought in earlier that morning to confront the crowd. The only issue was that they were behind the gates, and when the crowd arrived, the gates opened and police poured out. “It was probably the worst decision made by the chief” Shields commented.⁵⁷ It lost strikers to peaceful means, and made the jobs of law enforcement harder. To Strikers and strike breakers alike, thought that the Clinton police department was corrupt and bought off by SBI.⁵⁸ Despite his support for the union, like Carl Nord, Mr. Shields lost confidence in union leadership and switched support.

The union’s tactics, when bargaining with CCPC, and lack of leadership were taking longer than anyone expected and caused many members of the Clinton community to become pessimistic of the strike and its cause. In addition to the length of time the strike was taking, many community members, as well as Mr. Shields were also angered by the use of political activists such as Angela Davis, a registered communist spoke often at Local 6 rallies. Mr. Shields refused to back a union that aligned itself with a communist representative;⁵⁹ ultimately causing the officer to change his opinion on who to support during the strike.

The Reverend Gill Dawes

Reverend Gil Dawes played an integral role in the community at the time of the strike. Raised in Iowa and Illinois and educated in Boston, the reverend spent many years of his life preaching and spreading faith throughout Latin America – mainly focused in Argentina and Costa Rica.⁶⁰ While in Latin America the Reverend spend much of time aiding in underground anti-dictator movements and

⁵⁶ Urbanczyk, 2015

⁵⁷ Wright, 2015

⁵⁸ Urbanczyk, 2015

⁵⁹ Wright, 2015.

⁶⁰ Dawes, Rev. Gil, interview by Merle Davis. 1982. Cedar Rapids, Iowa. August 25. (p.3)

labor unions. Therefore, the United States Government asked Dawes to come back to the United States. So, he came back to Iowa “determined to tell the story of what I knew was happening in Latin America, that wasn’t being told.”⁶¹ At first he was commissioned by the U.S. government to travel around – to schools, churches and colleges and spread his story. However, once that let up he had no church and no job, and ended up as a truck driver in Iowa while searching for a pastoral position. Eventually he found a position in the Methodist church in Comanche, Iowa where he could use his knowledge of the gospel and his experience with labor unions and liberation theology to assist the community through it’s struggle with labor.⁶² It’s this liberation theology that really influenced Dawe’s ministry and eventually came to impact the town of Clinton during the 1979/1980 labor strike.

Speaking of the Methodist church in general, Dawes says that it’s general philosophy in any controversial topics was to “get all the facts... it may take forty-five years, but we’ll wait it out. That’s the way they [the Methodist church] always do with labor.”⁶³ In regards to the Clinton Strike, this was the general philosophy as well, but Clinton he says was more difficult because it was a company town. “Two companies controlled the police, the newspapers, just about everything that went on – Clinton Corn and DuPont.” Therefore nobody ever knew what was really going on and it became hard to get the facts, but Dawes figured that the church should become a sort of sounding board for the people whose voices weren’t being heard by the media.⁶⁴

This outlet for people was much needed during the strike of 1979/1980, however Dawes methods were often considered controversial and Dawes did not simply stay behind the podium. Much of his involvement with the community during the strike came in forms other than the gospel – he handed out pamphlets and even was seen on the picket line. But, ultimately Dawes was integral to

⁶¹ Dawes, 1982. p. 3

⁶² Dawes, 1982. p.16

⁶³ Dawes, 1982. p.19

⁶⁴ Dawes, 1982. p.19

the strike because he was a respected member of the community and someone who had built trust and relationships with many people involved. He tells a story in his interview that highlights the deep personal relationships he developed with the people of Clinton:

“For instance I did my hospital calling and my marrying and burying and all of this just like any other preacher. I went to the hospital and I saw a woman out in the hall, and she was crying. I recognized her just vaguely and I asked her ‘what was the trouble.’ Well, her husband had just been scalded at Clinton Corn. So I asked her about it and I went in to see her husband. Her husband died, scalded to death with steam at Clinton Corn. Many people have been killed there. Well, that happened to be Mike Kranjnovich’s dad. I didn’t know that. Anyway, the kinds of personal contacts that you have then lead to people having enough confidence in you that when they need some help in the labor union way they ask for it, too. So when the wildcat strike came up and they asked me if I’d help I said, “sure.”⁶⁵

Therefore, it was this kind of personal devotion to the community and public role that led the reverend Dawes to lead such an important role in the strike – and where he went to picket or lend assistance so did many people from his congregation.

With this public image, and large support network, Reverend Dawes carried a lot of persuasion when it came for fighting for the union. Once he was clubbed by the police, arrested, and held in jail for protesting – and once the report was released with images of his bruised body many people sympathized with the union and began to join their cause – the photo even sparked national attention. However, within Clinton there was also a backlash against the police and even backlash against the reverend for “showing too much skin” in the photo of his bruises.⁶⁶ His part in the media was once again integral to the strike when a service he held was broadcast on national television and again when he okayed his church as the venue for the controversial Angela Davis’ speech to the Clinton Corn strikers.

Recurring Themes

⁶⁵ Dawes, 1982. p.21

⁶⁶ Dawes, 1982. p.29

Switching sides was common, where opinions changed as time passed. Many members of strike breakers sided with the union until financial burdens forced many strikers to cross the fence and resume work. Vandalism sucked and was done by both strike breakers and strikers alike. The vandalizing of cars and other property was another push factor for options to switch.

Political agendas of leaders were important and defined one's position concerning the strike. Angela Davis and Reverend, a registered communist, had a profound effect on strike support. Most interviewees waived their support for the union after Angela Davis gave funding to union leaders for the strike. The Berlin wall wouldn't be torn down for another decade, but most interviewees switched sides due to Davis's increased support. Many pointed to Davis's political agenda as being a communist as their reasons for why they switched to company support⁶⁷. While others sided with Angela Davis, not because of her political views but rather for who she supported in the strike. The head of the union during the strike didn't recognize Davis's communist agenda as a problem, describing it as unimportant⁶⁸.

Lack of leadership was another common cause for the union's loss that interviewees agreed on. The head wasn't in control of the body, many would say. The leadership of the strike was uncoordinated and unorganized, where union leadership would agree one day then retract its agreements within hours. Some claimed they were drunk and retracted their concessions made with CCPC⁶⁹. Many civilians or other third party members related with the strikers, not the Union. Where strikers were individually identified as the moving factor, the union was less important. It was the people behind the fence and striking the company whom the Clinton community understood. Few couldn't back the overshadowing powers of the Union and the Company. Many interviewees identified themselves to the strikers and who they were, not with the union they were represented by⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ Dawes, 1982. p. 82

⁶⁸ Urbanczyk, 2015

⁶⁹ Urbanczyk, 2015

⁷⁰ Urbanczyk, 2015

Part III

Conclusion

A Lasting Legacy – the impacts of the strike as seen in today's Clinton (2016)

A legacy of bitter relationships caused by the strike has left a bad taste in the mouths of a community. Ultimately the local 6 union was forced to disband after the strike – the final loss for the union. To a family lost on their way to Chicago or Des Moines, Clinton is a fresh sight among the rolling corn fields of Iowa. With tiny stores with their large windows painted by blankets of dust and bars that were alive before the 50's still open and still struggling. The kids will reminisce about the towns splendor for a second then squeal for the rest of the ride about the random and “insane” dome of reflective gold, a shiny figurine encompassed by dusty glass and failed businesses. They will not see the picket signs or the rows of striking workers in jeans and tee shirts lined up around A.D.M.'s main entrance gates. They will not hear chants for redemption over a light bulb discovered in a lunch box and condemnation for workers who cross the fence and return to work. The only connection will be four minutes of a peculiar smell and the glisten of the golden dome that will fade as the road guides the visitors through city limits.

There is no plaque, there is no monument placed in a park or near city hall - there is nothing but the smell. The strike of 1979-80 won't have a large impact on a passing family; the strike between CCPC and the Local #6 union doesn't exist in the outside world. However, to Clinton's community, the citizen's voices preach the contrary. The strike was a strike, one of many across the United States representing a shift in consumer culture. When thinking of the strike many remember the momentous case of a certain pilot's union and former president Reagan's final say over their strike. Both strikes met with failure for the union and came about in the corporations favor⁷¹. Clinton's strike might not have had such memorable characters like President Ronald Reagan, but characters like Angela Davis, Reverend Dawes, and Mike Krajnovich are immortalized for future generations.

⁷¹ Rhomberg, Chris. “The Return of Judicial Repression: What Has Happened to the Strike?”

Forum (2194-6183 10, no. 1 (Jan2012): 1–20. (p.7)

The baby boomer generation looks upon the strike as the true decline of Clinton, while millennium babies born from the ashes of its picket lines see it as the past. They live in the current Clinton, where oral histories describe the strike as vividly and varied as any other experience. The millennials know of the uncle, aunt, or neighbor they don't talk to because of an argument over crossing a picket line. So, although they didn't experience the strike firsthand, they know Clinton has changed. People lost their jobs and small businesses closed their doors to gather dust and wait for economy to bounce back. The "strike" hasn't ended, where the community is still split. Despite almost forty years, people won't talk. The few who do, reach out with only one thing on their minds. Like a veteran with scars, they come to tell their story, then leave happy from a polite conversation; hoping that their experiences can shed light for the current Clinton. The strike happened and to those who "survived" affected them to such a degree that a community is still divided, but all come together preaching the same result. The strike changed Clinton, most say for the worst. Even with CCPC dissolving into A.D.M. a factory that for the first five years was a "horrible pace to work" - Carl Nord even fondly referring to ADM after the strike as "ADM or Another dead man."⁷²

The strike caught Clinton in a down draft of changing consumer culture and shifting relationships between corporations and unions. Neither was willing to bend to the others will resulting in the union party suffering consequences. But the community received the burnt and shortest end of the stick. The economy took a hit, leaving small business empty and failing. Shields described strikers boycotting small businesses that did agree with the strike, resulting in a crisis for Clinton small businesses.⁷³ Ultimately, the strike occurred at the point of intersection between the increase of the consumer economy and the downturn of labor unions. This point of intersection was significant for the country as a whole, and can be seen in various other cases; however, the Clinton Corn Strike of 1979/1980 perfectly exemplifies the conflicting interests. Unfortunately for Clinton the remnants of

⁷² Urbanczyk, 2015

⁷³ Wright, 2015

the strike can still be seen, but since the strike the city has slowly adapted and the hope for a brighter future remains.

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