The CIO at Bay: Labor Militancy and Politics in Akron, 1936–1938

Daniel Nelson

CIO buttons "sprouted on overalls, shirtwaists, and workers' hats and caps . . . badges of a new independence. Labor was on the march as it had never been before in the history of the Republic." Thus did Edward Levinson capture the excitement and potential of the union upsurge of the mid-1930s. Between 1936 and 1938 industrial unionism and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) became important innovative forces in American society. They transformed the labor movement and industrial relations, influenced the American political life, and raised hopes and fears of a unified working class. Yet Levinson emphasized only one side of the events of 1936–1938. At its height the industrial union movement revealed unexpected weaknesses. It lost organizing campaigns and strikes, suffered rebuffs, and failed to consolidate its power. By 1939–1940 Levinson's imagery was outdated if not inaccurate. Although the reasons for the reversal are as numerous and as imprecise as the membership of the CIO in the late 1930s, one conclusion seems inescapable: CIO men and women were neither so united nor so determined as Levinson's language suggested. The workers themselves bore much of the responsibility for the relative fall of the CIO.[1]

The limits of labor power were nowhere more evident than in the 1937 CIO campaigns to extend the workers' influence from the union hall to city hall. In cities of all sizes, CIO leaders attempted to flex blue-collar muscles at the ballot box by electing local government officials. Their efforts, built on union

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[1] Edward Levinson, *Labor on the March* (New York, 1937), 236; Walter Galenson, *The CIO Challenge to the AFL: A History of the American Labor Movement, 1935–1941* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 583–85; David Brody, "Reinterpreting the Labor History of the 1930s," in David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle* (New York, 1980), 120–72; Staughton Lynd, "The Possibility of Radicalism in the Early 1930's: The Case of Steel," *Radical America*, 6 (Nov.–Dec. 1972), 37–64; James R. Green, "Working Class Militancy in the Depression," *ibid.*, 1–35; Robert H. Zieger, "The Limits of Militancy: Organizing Paper Workers, 1933–1935," *Journal of American History*, 63 (Dec. 1976), 638–57; Melvyn Dubofsky, "Not So 'Turbulent Years': Another Look at the American 1930's," *Amerikastudien*, 24 (no. 1, 1979), 5–20.

triumphs in industry and in politics in 1936–1937, were important steps in a concerted, though ill-defined, attempt to expand the CIO role outside industry. The significance of their actions was unmistakable. Victory in 1937 would encourage a more aggressive and identifiable union stance in politics and in society; defeat would dictate a more cautious and subdued role. In fact, union candidates won few victories and produced little evidence that labor's march to the polling booth would win many victories in the future. Directly or indirectly, the 1937 results encouraged unionists to remain within the New Deal coalition and to ally themselves with Democratic candidates.[2]

Of the CIO efforts of 1937, the most meaningful may well have been the union contest for control of Akron, Ohio, considered by contemporaries the most unionized city in the United States. By 1937 industrial unions had become the dominant influence in the city's economic life. They had recruited thousands of members, demonstrated their might in confrontations with employers, and transformed the practice of industrial relations. A move into the political arena would complete their rise to power. By most measures they ought to have had little difficulty capturing the city government. They had capable leaders, substantial resources, and more committed participants than did either political party. The 1937 election proved the error of such calculations. CIO failure in Akron exposed the unionists' misconceptions about their potential and, more important, about their ability to gauge their constituents. They assumed a unity of purpose and outlook that did not exist and overlooked forces that restricted the workers' willingness to act in concert. The Akron campaign was a measure of the limits of CIO power and of the tangled grass roots of the industrial union movement at the most critical phase of its development.[3]

The behavior of Akron unions and workers in 1937 was an outgrowth of the particular environment in which they worked and lived. In the 1910s the city had been the nation's preeminent boomtown, a sprawling tribute to the automobile age. Encouraged by advertisements and recruiters, men from hard-scrabble farms in Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and points south had arrived in large numbers to earn wages that, for the toughest and most resilient, far exceeded Henry Ford's five-dollar day. The boom ended with the recession of 1920–1921, and the slower expansion of the 1920s blurred many of its features. Gradually, Akron came to resemble other industrial cities. By the late 1920s it might have been "Middletown."[4] Yet the boom left a legacy that

[2] James Caldwell Foster, *The Union Politic: The CIO Political Action Committee* (Columbia, Mo., 1975), 6–9; David Brody, "The Uses of Power II: Political Action," in David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America*, 215–57; J. David Greenstone, *Labor in American Politics* (New York, 1969), 3–80.

[3] Levinson, *Labor on the March*, 265; Ruth McKenney, *Industrial Valley* (New York, 1939), 373–79.

[4] Federal Housing Administration, Division of Economics and Statistics, *Akron, Ohio: Housing Market Analysis* (Washington, 1938), 39–44; Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture* (New York, 1929), 7–9. Of the nine criteria Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd cite, Akron qualified in seven categories. It was too large (255,000 inhabitants in 1930) and too much an industrial city to meet their specifications.

accounted for several of the city's distinctive features. Though the overall distribution of occupations in 1930 and in 1940 did not differ from the national averages for cities, the manufacturing sector was highly concentrated. The rubber industry employed 79 percent of the city's industrial workers in 1929 and 69 percent a decade later. Rubber production in turn was concentrated in a handful of massive plants. Three companies, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, and the B. F. Goodrich Company, together employed more than 30,000 Akron workers in the 1930s, at least 90 percent of all local rubber industry employees. Severe competition in the 1920s had eliminated many smaller factories; the depression completed the winnowing process. Only General Tire and Rubber Company, with more than 1,500 workers, approached the size of the "Big Three."[5]

Other homogenizing factors created a basis for united action. Wage rates in rubber manufacturing, on average, exceeded those of any other industry; before the depression production workers in the rubber industry enjoyed high, though often erratic, earnings because of the growth of the auto industry and because of rapid changes in the technology of tire production. As a result, they had more to lose than did most other industrial employees. After 1929 the rubber industry, dependent on auto production and use, became severely depressed. Unemployment was high, and underemployment, even higher. The affluence of earlier years became a bitter memory. Outside the plants workers confronted other difficulties. Akron was almost evenly divided between homeowners and renters, with younger rubber workers constituting the bulk of the latter. Housing in areas adjacent to the rubber plants was generally of poor quality, a legacy of the speculative boom of the 1910s. By the 1930s much of it had deteriorated badly. In 1937 Akron may have been the most dilapidated major city in the country. Unimaginative city administrators and severe municipal financial problems seemingly foreclosed any possibility of relief.[6]

The passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) in June 1933 was a powerful catalyst for Akron workers. It gave an aura of legitimacy to their

[5] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: Manufacturers, 1929* (3 vols., Washington, 1933), III, 411; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Manufacturers, 1939* (3 vols., Washington, 1942), III, 795. The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company averaged 14,304 hourly employees in 1936 and 12,767 in 1937. The Firestone Tire and Rubber Company had 10,368 workers in early 1936 and approximately 8,000 in late 1937. The B. F. Goodrich Company had 13,500 to 14,000 in early 1937. Employment records, 1920–1945, Goodyear Archives (Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, Akron, Ohio); Alfred Lief, *The Firestone Story: A History of the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company* (New York, 1951), 225, 230; Federal Housing Administration, *Akron, Ohio*, 76; "Summary of Enrollment," [B. F. Goodrich Company] file 1832, box 2116, National Labor Relations Board Records, RG 25 (National Archives).

[6] *Akron Beacon Journal*, July 13, 1937, p. 23; Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Bulletin No. 737: Wages in Rubber Manufacturing Industry, August 1942* (Washington, 1943), 10–22; Federal Housing Administration, *Akron, Ohio*, 109–10, 132–38. The 1930 census reported 8.8 percent of the Akron labor force and 7.4 percent of rubber industry employees in Akron unemployed. Monthly employment fluctuations were reported for the 1930s. In November 1937, 11.7 percent of Akron workers were totally unemployed. Nearly as many were employed at government relief projects or partially employed. *Ibid.*, 94, 218–25, 228; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Unemployment* (2 vols., Washington, 1931), I, 775, 787.

grievances, provided a solution in collective bargaining, and neutralized traditional employer resistance to union organization. Rubber workers swamped the American Federation of Labor (AFL) federal labor unions that appeared in the wake of the NIRA. By the spring of 1934, 85 percent of Akron rubber workers were union members.[7] Depression conditions gave them a sense of shared distress, and the New Deal provided a blueprint for collective action. Henceforth, union membership would fluctuate with union fortunes, but a return to the status quo ante was no more likely than the reelection of Herbert Hoover.

In the following years the gulf between Akron employers and workers seemed to grow. Employer opposition to union demands strained whatever vestiges of company loyalty remained. Union leaders, unable to obtain positive results, became more vociferous in attacking the manufacturers, and workers became more aggressive. The first sit-down strike occurred at General Tire in June 1934. In late 1935, shortly after the federal locals had combined to form an international union, the United Rubber Workers (URW), a series of spontaneous sit-downs occurred at the Big Three plants, inaugurating the sit-down era in American industry. By that time depression conditions and the frustrations of the National Recovery Administration period had created the preconditions for a brief, though remarkable, period of worker-induced innovation.[8]

Those developments, which paralleled similar tendencies in the auto, steel, electrical, and other "mass production" industries and which form the core of traditional accounts of the rise of industrial unionism, were, however, only one side of the depression experience. Economic decline and New Deal policies had varied, even contradictory effects. They fragmented the working class at the same time they seemed to unite it, and they encouraged identification with a particular employer as well as hostility to employers generally. Labor may have been on the march, but it marched to a variety of drummers. In the rubber industry two factors were particularly divisive. The first was the enduring effects of earlier personnel innovations. All of the major rubber companies had had reasonably advanced personnel programs in the 1920s, but Goodyear, the unquestioned leader, had the only company union that predated the NIRA. This was a critical distinction. The Goodyear Industrial Assembly operated with considerable success in the 1920s and continued to hold the loyalties of many workers in the 1930s.[9] Company unions formed in response

[7] W. W. Thompson, "History of the Labor Movement in Akron, Ohio," [ca. 1936], United Rubber Workers file, Congress of Industrial Organizations Papers (Catholic University Library, Washington).

[8] Harold S. Roberts, *The Rubber Workers: Labor Organization and Collective Bargaining in the Rubber Industry* (New York, 1944), 124–47; Alfred Winslow Jones, *Life, Liberty, and Property: A Story of Conflict and a Measurement of Conflicting Rights* (Philadelphia, 1941), 88–96; Daniel Nelson, ed., "The Beginning of the Sit-Down Era: The Reminiscences of Rex Murray," *Labor History*, 15 (Winter 1974), 91–96; Levinson, *Labor on the March*, 171; McKenney, *Industrial Valley*, 251–73. For the movement generally, see Sidney Fine, *Sit-Down: The General Motors Strike of 1936–1937* (Ann Arbor, 1969); and Joel Seidman, *"Sit Down"* (New York, 1937).

[9] Hugh Allen, *The House of Goodyear: Fifty Years of Men and Industry* (Akron, 1949), 183–84; Paul W. Litchfield, *The Industrial Republic: A Study in Industrial Economics* (Akron, 1919),

to Section 7A of the NIRA at the other plants were moribund by 1935; the Goodyear Industrial Assembly competed successfully with the URW local until 1936 and persisted, in the form of several "independent" unions, for years thereafter. To many veteran Goodyear employees, the company union provided a safe, respectable mechanism for adjusting grievances and obtaining additional benefits. It offered most of the advantages of URW membership without the necessity of dues payments or the dangers of an adversarial relationship. Above all, it ensured that the company would not waver from its commitments, formal and informal, to consider seniority in making layoffs.[10]

The second factor, little recognized, was equally important. By reducing employment opportunities, the depression curbed interplant mobility and created a more or less permanent labor force at each company. In the 1910s and 1920s, the city had had a single labor market characterized by high rates of turnover and mobility. Men and women changed employers at will; it was not uncommon for a veteran employee to have worked in all the city's major plants within the span of a few years. The World War I era probably marked the apogee of that trend. Goodyear had a net turnover rate (resignations and discharges exclusive of layoffs) of 197 percent in 1920. In the 1920s that rate declined as industry growth slowed and as the Goodyear management worked to retain proficient employees. Yet net turnover typically ranged from 45 percent to 55 percent of the labor force. Goodyear hired nearly 66,000 workers between 1924 and 1929 and lost or fired 53,000, while average employment ranged from 14,500 to 17,000. The depression abruptly altered that pattern. Net turnover fell to 10 percent in 1930 and declined steadily to 4.6 percent in 1935. Layoffs kept total turnover at about half the level of the 1920s from 1930 to 1933, but thereafter it, too, dropped. Altogether, Goodyear hired 17,000 employees and lost 17,000 to resignation or discharge between 1930 and 1935.[11] The pattern at the other plants must have been similar. By the mid-

41–59; Paul W. Litchfield, *Industrial Voyage: My Life as an Industrial Lieutenant* (New York, 1954), 183–87. For the company union movement, see Stuart D. Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880–1940* (Chicago, 1976), 119–34; David Brody, "The Rise and Decline of Welfare Capitalism," in Brody, *Workers in Industrial America*, 55–56; C. Ray Gullett and Edmund R. Gray, "The Impact of Employee Representation Plans upon the Development of Management-Worker Relationships in the United States," *Marquette Business Review*, 20 (Fall 1976), 95–101; and Daniel Nelson, "The Company Union Movement, 1900–1937: A Reexamination," *Business History Review*, 56 (Autumn 1982), 335–57. For industrial unionism generally in this period, see Fine, *Sit-Down*, 54–99; Irving Bernstein, *Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker 1933–41* (Boston, 1970), 92–125, 432–634; and Galenson, *CIO Challenge*, 75–459.

[10] "Annual Reports" of the Goodyear Industrial Assembly, cases 8-R-184 and 8-C-378, box 1878, National Labor Relations Board Records; "Constitution of the Employee Conference Plan," Oct. 14, 1933, Firestone Archives (Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, Akron, Ohio); H. S. Firestone to L. K. Firestone, Feb. 12, 1934, *ibid.*

[11] Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, "Statement Submitted to the Fact-Finding Board," Nov. 30, 1935, file 195/336, Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service Papers, RG 280 (National Archives); John D. House interview by Daniel Nelson, April 18, 1972, tape recording (American History Research Center, Bierce Library, University of Akron, Akron, Ohio); Harley Anthony interview by Nelson, May 15, 1972, tape recording, *ibid.*; Rex Murray interview by Nelson, Sept. 20, 1972, tape recording, *ibid.*; Ralph Turner interview by Nelson, May 10, 1972, tape recording, *ibid.*; John Kumpel interview by Nelson, Oct. 25, 1972, tape recording, *ibid.*; A. A. Wilson interview by Nelson, May 17, 1973, tape recording, *ibid.*

1930s a large majority of workers at each company were veteran employees whose years at other plants were a dim memory and who necessarily equated their lot with a particular setting and group of individuals. Though working and living within a few city blocks of one another, they became Goodyear and Firestone workers more than rubber workers.

Union leaders reflected those trends. They were determined, often vociferous critics of the industry. With few exceptions they were also seasoned employees, American natives of southern origins who, after a period of transiency in the 1910s or early 1920s, had settled into permanent positions. Their demographic and occupational profiles are indistinguishable from those of Goodyear company union officials. A combination of background and personal qualities accounted for their rise. Southerners had long formed an important and widely recognized subculture in the plants and were thought of as "typical" rubber workers. In 1933 they looked to their own kind for leadership, boosting men known for sincerity, honesty, and assertiveness. Within that group individuals with leadership experience and visibility usually won the top positions. At Goodyear former company union officers were disproportionately represented in the union hierarchy. At the other plants trade union experience may have played a similar role. Men who had once been members of the United Mine Workers (UMW) or of the railway unions won many URW leadership posts.[12]

The sudden desperate need for competent leaders created similar disparities in other industries and unions after 1933. In Pittsburgh, Detroit, Woonsocket (Rhode Island), Covington (Virginia), and other industrial centers, workers turned naturally to men and women with leadership skills and other appropriate qualifications, such as education and prior union experience. The result was a new generation of union bureaucrats, who were younger, ethnically more diverse, and generally more favorable to political activism than were their counterparts in the established trade union movement. These individuals, together with a disparate mixture of AFL veterans, created and built the CIO.[13]

Until 1936 the URW, for all its organizing successes, was an untested, unproved organization. It had stumbled badly in efforts to win contracts in 1934 and 1935. In early 1936, however, a series of unforeseen events transformed it and the nascent industrial union movement. A series of spontaneous sit-downs at the Akron plants led to a full-scale strike at Goodyear in mid-

[12] Daniel Nelson, "The Leadership of the United Rubber Workers, 1933–1942," *Detroit in Perspective*, 5 (Spring 1981), 21–30; "The Rolling Tire," *Fortune*, 14 (Nov. 1936), 100; Exhibit 30, cases 8-R-184 and 8-C-378, box 1878, National Labor Relations Board Records.

[13] Ronald Schatz, "Union Pioneers: The Founders of Local Unions at General Electric and Westinghouse, 1933–1937," *Journal of American History*, 66 (Dec. 1979), 586–602; Peter Friedlander, *The Emergence of a UAW Local, 1936–1939: A Study in Class and Culture* (Pittsburgh, 1975), 10–21; Gary Gerstle, "The Mobilization of the Working Class Community: The Independent Textile Workers Union in Woonsocket, 1931–1946," *Radical History Review*, 17 (Spring 1978), 161–72; Robert H. Zieger, "The Union Comes to Covington: Virginia Paperworkers Organize, 1933–1952," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 126 (no. 1, 1982), 51–89; Walter Licht and Hal Seth Barron, "Labor's Men: A Collective Biography of Union Officialdom during the New Deal Years," *Labor History*, 19 (Fall 1978), 538–39.

February. The strike, which idled 14,000 workers for five weeks and which resulted in a partial union triumph, was a turning point in the labor history of the 1930s. It destroyed the Goodyear Industrial Assembly and enhanced the reputation of the URW, enabling Akron locals to attract thousands of new members. Coming shortly after the founding of the CIO, it also provided John L. Lewis and his lieutenants with an opportunity to demonstrate the might of industrial unionism. The Goodyear strike was the first of a series of widely publicized confrontations that created an image of CIO militancy and invincibility—of "labor on the march."[14]

In the Akron plants waves of sit-down strikes followed the Goodyear strike. Between March and December 1936, when the sit-down technique spread to the auto and other industries, more than sixty sit-downs convulsed the rubber factories. Union officials, fearing a complete breakdown of worker discipline, opposed the sit-downs with increasing vigor. Local leaders at Firestone, and to a lesser degree at Goodrich, were most outspoken and successful in containing unrest. The sit-down movement gradually faded at those plants. Labor activists, especially those at Goodyear, the scene of more or less continuous upheaval, began to worry about the "conservatism" of the Firestone and Goodrich workers. Had union leaders undermined the organizations' vitality? In any event, the Goodyear strike and the sit-downs amply demonstrated the disruptive potential of the URW. Community alliances began to reform on pro-union and anti-union lines. By the fall of 1936, Akron probably had more union members per capita than any other city in the United States and had emerged as a "test tube" for industrial-relations innovations.[15]

In the following months Akron unionists made a concerted move into local politics, a step that was to serve as an augury of CIO influence in the political realm. Like other militants, they had been aware of their political potential and the deficiencies of conventional politicians and parties. They had taken no concerted action, however, until 1936. During the Goodyear strike the sheriff, the prosecuting attorney, and common pleas judges had sided with the antistrike forces, removing any lingering doubts about the role of politics in industrial relations. In the meantime a URW sympathizer, Wilmer Tate of the International Association of Machinists, had successfully challenged an AFL traditionalist for the presidenty of the Akron Central Labor Union. A colorful, outspoken champion of industrial unionism, Tate was a proponent of working-class political action who maintained clandestine ties with the small, but vociferous, local Communist party. His rise pushed the unions toward an

[14] Daniel Nelson, "The Great Goodyear Strike of 1936," *Ohio History*, 92 (1983), 6–36; Bernstein, *Turbulent Years*, 352–431, 592–600; Roberts, *Rubber Workers*, 147–51; Levinson, *Labor on the March*, 143–46; Jones, *Life, Liberty, and Property*, 99–108; Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tyne, *John L. Lewis: A Biography* (New York, 1977), 226–28, 234; Galenson, *CIO Challenge*, 271–72.

[15] Daniel Nelson, "Origins of the Sit-Down Era: Worker Militancy and Innovation in the Rubber Industry, 1934–1938," *Labor History*, 23 (Spring 1982), 198–255; Harley Anthony interview by Nelson, April 5, 1972, Dec. 2, 1976, tape recording (American History Reserach Center); House interview; Kumpel interview; Robert Morehead, "The Test Tube City Rejects the Union," *Nation's Business*, 26 (Feb. 1938), 55–58, 91–93.

activist role. By the spring of 1936, "the boys were ready to go somewhere. They wanted some action on the political front."[16]

Tate took the lead in the following months. His aim was to make the rubber workers the nucleus of an Ohio Farmer-Labor party that would be affiliated with the Minnesota Farmer-Labor party, the Wisconsin Progressive party, and others.[17] With a platform emphasizing various pro-union legislative measures, Tate and other dissidents hoped to create a national movement for 1940. In June 1936 five hundred delegates, most of them union representatives, met in Akron to inaugurate the local movement. They soon encountered major, ultimately insurmountable obstacles. The national and state Farmer-Labor parties were stillborn, leaving them with no prospect of wider affiliation or influence. Local politicians undercut the Farmer-Laborites at every opportunity; the Democrats in particular pressured union sympathizers to abandon a movement that threatened to defeat President Franklin D. Roosevelt's local allies. Tate's flirtation with the radicals was the last straw. He tried to recruit unionists of all ideological persuasions, but his efforts merely provided a forum for Communists and Trotskyists from the teachers and Works Progress Administration (WPA) unions. To most unionists, including virtually all the URW leaders, that was too much. By the time election officials ruled the Farmer-Labor ticket off the Ohio ballot in October, the local effort, started with such zeal and fanfare in June, was a dim memory to most Akron voters.[18]

A second, less conspicuous, but ultimately more substantial, effort to extend URW power paralleled the rise and fall of the Farmer-Labor party. Lewis and other CIO leaders organized Labor's Non-Partisan League in the spring of 1936 to mobilize labor support for Roosevelt's reelection. Except in New York the league operated as an adjunct to the UMW. In Ohio, a UMW stronghold, it sponsored numerous rallies and radio addresses for Roosevelt. Those efforts presumably contributed to the Roosevelt landslide in Ohio and to the

[16] Richard W. Shrake II, "Working Class Politics in Akron, Ohio, 1936: The Rubber Workers and the Failure of the Farmer-Labor Party" (M.A. thesis, University of Akron, 1974), 31–33; McKenney, *Industrial Valley*, 94–95; Wilson interview; Ray C. Sutliff interview by Nelson, April 18, 1979 (in Nelson's possession). A union partisan, a Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) member, and, covertly, a Garnet L. Patterson speech writer, Ray C. Sutliff followed the campaign closely as a political reporter for the *Akron Times Press*. *Ibid.* For unions' political activism in other industries, see David J. Pivar, "The Hosiery Workers and the Philadelphia Third Party Impulse, 1929–1935," *Labor History*, 5 (Winter 1964), 18–28; and Eric Leif Davin and Staughton Lynd, "Picket Line and Ballot Box: The Forgotten Legacy of the Local Labor Party Movement, 1932–1936," *Radical History Review*, 22 (Winter 1979–80), 43–63.

[17] Hugh T. Lovin, "The Ohio 'Farmer-Labor' Movement in the 1930s," *Ohio History*, 87 (Autumn 1978), 419–37; Shrake, "Working Class Politics," 33–55. See also Hugh T. Lovin, "The Persistence of Third Party Dreams in the American Labor Movement, 1930–1938," *Mid-America*, 58 (Oct. 1976), 141–57; and Hugh T. Lovin, "The Fall of the Farmer-Labor Parties, 1936–38," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 62 (Jan. 1971), 17.

[18] *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 8, 1936, p. 1; *ibid.*, Oct. 7, 1936, p. 21; Lovin, "Ohio 'Farmer-Labor' Movement," 429–30, 433–36; Shrake, "Working Class Politics," 51–52. Only one international union official, organizational director N. H. Eagle, and a handful of local union officials, chiefly Eagle's colleagues in the miniscule Mohawk Rubber Company local union, were sympathetic to left-wing causes. John Williamson, "Akron: A New Chapter in American Labor History," *Communist*, 15 (May 1936), 424. See also Kenneth Waltzer, "The Party and the Polling Place: American Communism and an American Labor Party in the 1930's," *Radical History Review*, 23 (Spring 1980), 108–12.

victories, by smaller margins, of Democratic Governor Martin L. Davey and nearly all other state and local Democratic candidates. In Akron the league embraced craft and industrial unionists and resuscitated a weak Democratic organization that had enjoyed little success outside several inner-city slum wards. Neither organized labor generally nor the URW had hitherto played a major role in local politics. The 1936 victories raised the inevitable question: Was the league a Democratic auxiliary, or vice versa? Though local league chairman M. S. Crouch, an officer of the Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers and of the Central Labor Union, worked amicably with the Democrats during the campaign, he left little doubt that the CIO was the dominant partner. For the unionists a labor-Democratic coalition promised the benefits without the handicaps of an independent effort such as the Farmer-Labor party. Shortly after the elections, when a municipal judgeship became vacant, the league demonstrated its power by securing Davey's appointment of a prolabor candidate without consulting Democratic officials. The appointee, Garnet L. Patterson, was a former URW attorney who had joined the National Labor Relations Board in 1935. A New Dealer more than a Democrat, he acknowledged his ambition for elective office.[19]

Labor's Non-Partisan League officials, reflecting CIO policy and rank-and-file sentiment, pressed their advantage in the spring of 1937. They cast their net as widely as possible among unionists. To counter charges of Lewis and CIO domination, they promoted craft leaders for league offices. Crouch hoped to elect AFL loyalists to every position, but industrial unionists forced him to include members of the Akron Newspaper Guild and the WPA union. Only when the league formed a separate policy-making executive council did URW leaders appear. Crouch and his allies were less successful in attracting candidates for the Democratic and Republican primaries, though they did not abandon their hope for a Republican primary ticket until May. In the meantime, the Democratic county chairman was "making a strenuous effort" to find a candidate "on whom both the party and labor interests can agree." He and Crouch met on several occasions and agreed in principle to a joint effort to unseat Republican Mayor Lee D. Schroy and the Republican majority on the city council in 1937. Unionists made no secret of their determination to be the dominant partner in the alliance. They spoke publicly of taking over the local Democratic organization and in late April began to recruit candidates without consulting party leaders. League officials chose Judge Patterson, whose ties to the party organization were at best tenuous, to head the CIO ticket. To complete their coup they entered union officials in every ward as Democratic candidates for the city council. Long-suffering Democratic regulars countered by entering several opposition candidates, including a mayoral prospect with an anti-union background.[20]

[19] Thomas T. Spencer, "Auxiliary and Non-Party Politics: The 1936 Democratic Presidential Campaign in Ohio," *Ohio History*, 90 (Spring 1981), 117–18; Dubofsky and Van Tyne, *John L. Lewis*, 249–52; Lovin, "Ohio 'Farmer-Labor' Movement," 435–36; Philip Taft, "Labor's Changing Political Line," *Journal of Political Economy*, 45 (Oct. 1937), 641–42; *Akron Beacon Journal*, Nov. 5, 1936, pp. 1, 16; *ibid.*, Nov. 9, 1936, p. 17; *ibid.*, Jan. 1, 1937, pp. 1, 6.

[20] *Akron Beacon Journal*, April 5, 1937, p. 19; *ibid.*, May 3, 1937, p. 17; *Akron Times Press*, May

During the primary campaign Patterson emphasized his New Deal ties. Pledging repeatedly to put "Roosevelt democracy" and "New Deal democracy" into city hall, he called for improved housing and expanded recreational facilities. He was particularly critical of Schroy's failure to embrace the New Deal housing program. Coupled with that appeal were attacks—à la Roosevelt—on the supposed alliance between big business and the Schroy administration. An able public speaker, Patterson impressed many observers with his stage presence and Rooseveltian oratory. By mid-summer Labor's Non-Partisan league leaders and Democratic officials alike conceded that the only remaining issue, barring an anti-CIO backlash, was the size of Patterson's victory.[21]

Two other developments during the same period ensured that the mayoral election would be more than a local contest. In March the Firestone URW local struck, demanding recognition as the employees' bargaining agent. The eight-week conflict that followed was far less dramatic and colorful than the Goodyear strike of 1936 but hardly less important. The settlement, concluded in late April, was an exact replica of the landmark Chrysler Corporation contract that the United Automobile Workers (UAW) had won in Detroit a few weeks before. It provided for union recognition and formal collective bargaining procedures. Together with the General Motors Corporation and the United States Steel Corporation contracts signed in February and March 1937, the Chrysler and Firestone settlements marked the high tide of CIO power in the 1930s. Militant unionists appeared capable of sweeping all of American industry before them.[22]

The second development of the spring of 1937, the "Little Steel" strike of May-July, provided the first intimations of CIO vulnerability. Akron residents, like observers elsewhere, came to associate the Steel Workers Organizing Committee and, by extension, other CIO groups with violence. The turmoil associated with the conflict seriously compromised the efforts of union leaders to create an image of prudence and responsibility. The strike's collapse also demonstrated that the union upsurge could be halted. Contrary to earlier impressions, CIO unions apparently remained subject to the same divisive forces that had traditionally thwarted efforts to organize the mass production industries. No less important, the steel strike converted Governor Davey from a prolabor to an anti-CIO stance. Davey's shift ensured the failure of the Little

23, 1937, p. 1; *Summit County Labor News*, April 9, 1937, p. 1; *ibid.*, May 7, 1937, pp. 1, 5. Labor's Non-Partisan League endorsed the Republican incumbent mayor for reelection in nearby Barberton, Ohio—evidence, it declared, of its determination "to support its friends, regardless of party alliance." *Ibid.*, Sept. 24, 1937, p. 1.

[21] *Akron Beacon Journal*, July 23, 1937, p. 34; *ibid.*, Aug. 11, 1937, p. 1; *ibid.*, Oct. 5, 1937, pp. 1, 20; *ibid.*, Oct. 13, 1937, pp. 1, 6.

[22] *Ibid.*, April 29, 1937, p. 1; *ibid.*, April 30, 1937, pp. 1, 6; P. W. Chappell to H. L. Kerwin, April 6, April 14, April 18, April 19, 1937, file 182/2448, Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service Papers; memoranda on the strike, March 26, April 10, April 16, 1937, Firestone Archives; Carl Haessler, "Union Whips Firestone," *United Rubber Worker*, 2 (May 1937), 1, 4, 5; Roberts, *Rubber Workers*, 158–60; Bernstein, *Turbulent Years*, 466–72.

Steel strike in Ohio; it also signaled the emergence of an anti-CIO, increasingly anti-New Deal faction within the Democratic party.[23]

On August 8 Labor's Non-Partisan League candidates won sweeping primary victories in Akron. Patterson overwhelmed his opponent by 17,600 to 6,500 votes. His total was nearly 50 percent higher than that of any primary candidate in the city's history, confirming the new political might of the CIO. His appeal, moreover, was broad-based. He had gotten at least 20 percent of Roosevelt's 1936 total in each of the city's ten wards and had finished far ahead of the league-endorsed council candidates, who in turn had handily defeated their opponents, including two incumbents. Local gamblers made Patterson and the union city council candidates heavy favorites to win the general election.[24]

The ensuing campaign marked the beginning of a concerted CIO effort to build on the example of 1936 and to create a union presence in American politics. In New York, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Akron, and a handful of smaller communities with large concentrations of union members, CIO leaders attempted to extend their power to city hall. It was a prelude to a more ambitious effort, possibly an independent campaign, in the congressional elections of 1938 and in the presidential election of 1940. Politics, however, proved to be as challenging as the most complex negotiations, and CIO goals, as elusive as a Ford Motor Company or a Republic Steel Corporation contract. In New York the CIO was merely one member of the Fiorello La Guardia coalition. In Pittsburgh the CIO candidate failed to survive the primary. In Detroit UAW leaders running on an avowedly prolabor slate for the city council won places on the general election ballot but by margins so narrow that there was little prospect of a CIO-controlled government. Only in Akron did an attractive candidate offer a large group of voters an unambiguous choice. There the "CIO issue [was] more closely joined than in any other city."[25]

Patterson accordingly adopted a cautious campaign strategy. With few contacts outside the labor movement and with little money, he feared a blunder that would be impossible to overcome. Instead, he relied increasingly on the assurance of URW leaders that the unions would elect him. After August he seldom spoke about specific problems or plans. His substantive proposals for slum clearance, improved housing, and expanded public services gave way to attacks on the "closed," "undemocratic," and big-business-controlled Republican administration. Union leaders became more and more

[23] James L. Baughman, "Classes and Company Towns: Legends of the 1937 Little Steel Strike," *Ohio History*, 87 (Spring 1978), esp. 190–91; Bernstein, *Turbulent Years*, 478–97; Robert R. R. Brooks, *As Steel Goes, . . . : Unionism in a Basic Industry* (New Haven, 1940), 130–52. Forty United Rubber Workers (URW) members were arrested on June 22 while en route to picket in Youngstown, Ohio. *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 23, 1937, p. 1; *ibid.*, June 26, 1937, p. 13; *ibid.*, July 7, 1937, p. 13. For adverse public reaction to that incident, see *ibid.*, June 30, 1937, p. 13.

[24] *Akron Times Press*, Oct. 31, 1937, sec. D, p. 3; *Akron Beacon Journal*, Nov. 1, 1937, p. 6.

[25] Morehead, "Test Tube City," 55; *New York Times*, Nov. 2, 1937, pp. 1, 6; *ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1937, pp. 1, 12; Bruce Stave, *The New Deal and the Last Hurrah: Pittsburgh Machine Politics* (Pittsburgh, 1970), 154; Hugh T. Lovin, "CIO Innovators, Labor Party Ideologues, and Organized Labor's Muddles in the 1937 Detroit Elections," *Old Northwest*, 8 (Fall 1982), 234.

prominent in his campaign. Tate and URW officials regularly appeared at Democratic rallies and frequently upstaged him. The change of emphasis altered the character of the campaign. Despite his attractive qualities Patterson's approach emphasized his labor ties and conveyed a sense that union power, rather than the incumbent, was the principal issue. The Democratic council candidates reinforced that impression. They were union veterans who devoted most of their time to soliciting the support of fellow unionists. By November voters who followed the Democratic campaign had good reason to conclude that Patterson was first and foremost a union representative.[26]

Patterson's CIO ties also dictated the Republican strategy. After the primary the mayor's advisers decided on an aggressive campaign designed to highlight Patterson's union connection. The architects of that effort were Loren L. Poe, a public relations expert with big-business clients and close ties to Governor Davey, and Ray C. Bliss, an insurance executive who had recently embarked on a political career that would make him a fixture in state and national Republican affairs for nearly a half-century. In early September Poe arranged a secret meeting between Davey and Bliss at the statehouse in Columbus. The governor, reveling in the publicity that had accompanied his handling of the Little Steel strike, offered to throw the resources of his administration behind the Republican effort. Bliss eagerly accepted. Henceforth, state employees and interest-group representatives allied with Davey worked directly or indirectly for the Republicans. In late September the governor himself appeared before an Akron business group. His address was officially nonpolitical, but his attacks on Lewis and the CIO were tantamount to a Schroy endorsement.[27]

Poe and Bliss devised other ways to focus attention on the unions. The mayor's speeches, written by Poe, emphasized the sinister character of the opposition. Patterson was a "carpetbagger" who represented "outsiders," "radicals," and "communistic" elements that would ruin the city. Union victory would be synonymous with a "radical" takeover. Business would flee and the city would decline. When Bliss learned that Earl Browder, head of the Communist party, would endorse the Patterson effort in an Akron speech, he arranged to have Browder's remarks broadcast over a local radio station. The Republicans thus financed the local Communists' most important publicity coup of the decade. Later, when union zealots defaced Schroy billboards, Bliss left them as visible symbols of the unions' destructive potential. Poe and Bliss were equally shrewd in wooing nonunion Democrats and independents. With abundant funds contributed by local industrialists, they ran daily newspaper advertisements devoted to the "carpetbagger" and the "radical" themes. By

[26] Sutliff interview; Turner interview; *Akron Beacon Journal*, Oct. 5, 1937, pp. 1, 20; *ibid.*, Oct. 9, 1937, p. 6; *ibid.*, Oct. 23, 1937, pp. 1, 6. Despite the CIO's reputation for campaign spending, Labor's Non-Partisan League raised only $15,000 for the Patterson campaign. The league's national organization contributed $3,000; the Akron URW locals, more than $8,000. The Democratic party listed no campaign expenditures. The Lee D. Schroy campaign spent at least $38,000. *Ibid.*, Nov. 13, 1937, p. 1.

[27] *Akron Beacon Journal*, Sept. 20, 1937, pp. 1, 28; *ibid.*, Sept. 24, 1937, pp. 1, 6; Ray C. Bliss interview by Nelson, June 18, 1981 (in Nelson's possession).

the end of October, local observers predicted a closer race than had seemed possible in August. The outcome would likely depend on the unity of the union vote.[28]

Recognizing that likelihood, the Davey forces worked to widen the AFL-CIO rift. In September William Green, president of the AFL, ordered CIO unions expelled from central labor unions. Tate complied, but he and URW leaders immediately formed an AFL-CIO labor council to continue the craft-industrial union partnership that had been an important feature of Central Labor Union activity. Most AFL unions enthusiastically participated. A minority, led by building-trades business agents who had consistently opposed Tate, objected. When Tate indiscreetly criticized AFL national leaders at a URW gathering, they moved to oust him. Charging disloyalty, they obtained an order from Green dissolving the Central Labor Union, expelling Tate, and creating a new anti-CIO central body. Tate's AFL backers protested and boycotted the new organization. Davey's men, including several local AFL officials, attempted to exploit the situation. There were rumors of payoffs for union officers who would help "divert a small part of the labor vote into the . . . Schroy camp."[29] Labor's Non-Partisan League officials insisted that the dissidents would attract no more than 5 percent of AFL members, but they could ill-afford defections of any magnitude.

On November 2 Schroy defeated Patterson by 44,212 to 36,100 votes in a record turnout. Republicans also swept nine of thirteen council seats. Considering the city's large union membership and Patterson's appeal, it was a humiliating setback. If the CIO could not mount a successful campaign in Akron, where could it win? Republicans took heart and politicians generally took heed. Contemporary analysts from both camps attributed the debacle to the breakdown of the labor-Democratic coalition. Nonunion Democrats, troubled by union excesses during the previous year and by the Poe-Bliss strategy, supposedly rejected Patterson for the less attractive, but safer, Schroy. The unionists lost because they allowed themselves to be isolated. Even in Akron they could not win without allies.[30]

The election statistics provide some support for that interpretation. In 1936, 28.6 percent of the Akron electorate cast ballots for Alfred M. Landon, the Republican presidential candidate. Two years later 26.4 percent of Akron citizens identified themselves as Republicans in an opinon poll. Yet Schroy

[28] *Akron Beacon Journal*, Sept, 24, 1937, pp. 1, 6; *ibid.*, Sept. 27, 1937, p. 19; *ibid.*, Oct. 16, 1937, pp. 1, 7; *ibid.*, Oct. 22, 1937, p. 1; *Akron Times Press*, Oct. 31, 1937, sec. D, p. 3; Morehead, "Test Tube City," 55–56; Bliss interview; Nelson, "Origins of the Sit-Down Era," 200. The Republican charges were not just campaign rhetoric. The "flight" of rubber manufacturing to other, usually nonunion localities had begun in 1936; by 1937 it was a major local issue, and by 1938 the manufacturers' decision to "decentralize" was apparently irrevocable. *Ibid.*, 218–19; Charles B. Coates, "Labor Boomerang in Akron," *Factory Management and Maintenance*, 96 (July 1938), 38–39.

[29] *Summit County Labor News*, Oct. 1, 1937, p. 1; *Akron Beacon Journal*, Sept. 21, 1937, p. 29; *ibid.*, Oct. 2, 1937, p. 12; James O. Morris, *Conflict within the AFL: A Study of Craft versus Industrial Unionism, 1901–1938* (Ithaca, 1958), 247.

[30] *Akron Beacon Journal*, Nov. 2, 1937, p. 24; *ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1937, pp. 1, 6; *Akron Times Press*, Nov. 3, 1937, pp. 1, 4.

received 16,600 more votes than Landon and 7,800 more than the Republican gubernatorial candidate in 1938. In 73 percent of the precincts, Schroy's total was higher than a Republican could reasonably expect. Clearly Schroy did not win with Republican votes alone. An estimate of voting behavior in 1936–1937 suggests that in addition to virtually all the Landon supporters, Schroy attracted a quarter of the Roosevelt partisans and persuaded another quarter not to vote at all. It was the combination of Democrats and independents, people who continued to think of themselves as Democrats and independents after 1937, that made the difference.[31]

An analysis of the variables that best explain the outcome, in the order of their contribution, provides clues to the identities of the wayward Roosevelt partisans. (See table 1.) The level of rent paid by residents of a given neighborhood was the best predictor of the voters' mayoral choice. Low-rent neighborhoods were pro-Patterson; high-rent neighborhoods were anti-Patterson. Somewhat less important was the presence of middle-aged voters, men

[31] Jones, *Life, Liberty, and Property*, 316; Summit County manuscript election returns, Nov. 1934, Nov. 1936, Nov. 1937 (Board of Elections, Akron, Ohio); H. O. DeGraff, computations from 1930 population census, 1936 (in the possession of Akron, Ohio, Planning Department); Federal Housing Administration, *Akron, Ohio*, 129, 157; Burch Directory Company, *Akron, Barberton and Cuyahoga Falls Official City Directory, 1937* (Akron, 1936). The "reasonable" total for the Republican and Democratic candidates in each precinct was calculated by adding the party vote for prosecuting attorney and for state treasurer in 1934 and 1936 and dividing by four. The estimate of voting behavior is based on a comparison of 1936 and 1937 vote totals. Since no registration figures have survived, it is necessary to assume that the total for Franklin D. Roosevelt and Alfred M. Landon included all potential 1937 voters. The difference between the Roosevelt-Landon total and the Schroy-Patterson total in each precinct is therefore defined as the number of 1937 nonvoters. Based on this assumption, regression analysis ought to provide estimates of the distribution of the Roosevelt and Landon supporters in 1937. However, because of the method of calculating the nonvoters, the size of the Roosevelt majority, and other factors, the results were unsatisfactory. Despite this problem, it seems reasonable to assume that the Landon voters were highly motivated and extremely hostile to Patterson. If indeed they voted and cast their ballots overwhelmingly for Schroy, the Roosevelt vote must have gone approximately one-quarter to Schroy and one-half to Patterson, with the other quarter not voting. Working with data on population, sex, race, nationality, and age by decades, H. O. DeGraff showed population shifts between 1929 and 1936 and converted the data from political wards to census tracts. The tracts were more numerous than the wards, embracing 2–5 precincts rather than 15–25, and were organized by homogenous neighborhoods. After a house-by-house survey, the Federal Housing Administration listed values and rents by census tracts using a five-category classification. In this study values and rents are ranked from 1 (high) to 5 (low). A sample of 50 Akron precincts supplemented this information. The author selected 50 precincts (18 randomly chosen from the 65 that gave Schroy a 60 percent or greater majority, 10 randomly chosen from the 34 that gave Patterson a 60 percent or greater majority, and 23 randomly chosen from the 83 that gave either candidate a 50–60 percent majority). All individuals who lived in the area of each of the 50 precincts were listed and 100 names were drawn randomly from each list. The city directory supplied information on marital status, home ownership, and occupation for the 5,000 household heads. Altogether data was obtained on 34 variables: percent female, percent male, percent white, percent black, percent white native, percent white foreign born, percent immigrant, value of houses, level of rents, percent under age 20, percent age 21–24, percent age 25–34, percent age 35–44, percent age 45–64, percent age 65 and over, percent homeowners, percent married, percent professional, percent small business, percent clerical—total, percent clerical—rubber industry, percent factory—total, percent factory—rubber industry, percent craft—total, percent craft—rubber industry, percent supervisors, percent Goodyear wage earner, percent Firestone wage earner, percent Goodrich wage earner, percent General Tire wage earner, percent other rubber industry wage earner, percent unskilled, percent unemployed, percent unemployed—widows.

TABLE 1
Multiple Regression Coefficients for Democratic Mayoral Vote on Selected Variables

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable: Patterson Percentage of Total Vote by Precincts (N = 50)	
	'B' Coefficient (Standard Error)	Beta
Rent	.049 (.015)	.398
Age 35–44	−3.051 (.996)	−.311
Housing	.037 (.015)	.224
Firestone	.366 (.154)	.157
R^2 = .831		

Sources: Federal Housing Administration, Division of Economics and Statistics, *Akron, Ohio: Housing Market Analysis* (Washington, 1938), 129, 157; H. O. DeGraff, computations from 1930 population census, 1936 (in the possesison of Akron, Ohio, Planning Department); Summit County manuscript election returns, Nov. 1936, Nov. 1937 (Board of Elections, Akron, Ohio); Burch Directory Company, *Akron, Barberton and Cuyahoga Falls Official City Directory, 1937* (Akron, 1936).
Note: All coefficients are significant at the .01 level, except Firestone employment (.02). Computer programs of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences were used for this and all other statistical operations.

and women in their late thirties and early forties, who strongly opposed Patterson. Housing values reveal the same distinction as rental levels. Poor neighborhoods supported Patterson; richer ones opposed him. Finally, employment at Firestone, the only variable that indicates union influence, helps explain the voters' preferences. All other variables are comparatively insignificant and in combination account for less than one-fifth of the differences between precincts.[32]

Despite the preoccupation of both camps with union membership and with interest-group politics, Akron citizens appear to have voted their pocketbooks in 1937. Economic station far overshadowed employment relationships and other factors that might have influenced the election outcome. Yet the disparity between rich and poor (see table 1) is potentially misleading. Few Akron voters had large incomes or sumptuous homes. The vast majority owned or rented dwellings that were only marginally habitable. If the contest had truly pitted haves against have-nots, the Democrats would have won by a

[32] Federal Housing Administration, *Akron, Ohio*, 129, 158; H. O. DeGraff, computations from 1930 population census, 1936; Burch Directory Company, *Akron, Barberton and Cuyahoga Falls Official City Directory, 1937*; Summit County manuscript election returns, Nov. 1934, Nov. 1936, Nov. 1937.

landslide. The problem for the Democrats was that a large portion of the middle range of voters, people of modest means and modest dwellings who had supported the New Deal in 1936, favored Schroy in 1937. Class distinctions may have been decisive, but they did not conform to the usual stereotypes. In Akron the "middle" class of Schroy supporters extended virtually to the slums.[33]

An examination of specific occupational groups, their voting patterns in 1937, and the attitudes of their members toward corporate property rights shortly thereafter helps clarify that division. (See table 2.) There was a strong negative association between white-collar occupations and the Democratic vote and a generally positive association between blue-collar work and support for Patterson. There was also a positive correlation between voting behavior and attitudes toward corporate property, as contemporary analysts of the campaign would have predicted. Blue-collar workers and the unemployed identified with Patterson and anticorporate sentiments while many white-collar workers took the opposite position.[34] But there were also exceptions to this pattern. When forced to choose between a union-dominated candidate and a seemingly anti-union candidate, many small-business operators, including auto service station owners and others whose incomes were no higher than the wages of factory workers, whose views of corporate rights did not differ markedly from those of many blue-collar workers, and who had generally backed Roosevelt, apparently rejected Patterson. Clerical and service workers, whose ranks also included many poorly paid employees, were even less enthusiastic, subscribing presumably to the Republican argument that a Patterson victory would be bad for business and consequently for unorganized individuals whose fates depended largely on the state of the local economy. Many white-collar employees seemingly placed their immediate prospects ahead of any sense of class identity. Like most American white-collar workers, they were pragmatists, flirting with organized labor when it promised to enhance their prospects, rejecting it when, as in 1937, it seemed to endanger those prospects.[35]

The data also suggest Democratic defections among certain blue-collar groups (see table 2). The high negative coefficient of the nonunion rubber

[33] Burch Directory Company, *Akron, Barberton and Cuyahoga Falls Official City Directory, 1937*; Summit County manuscript election returns, Nov. 1936, Nov. 1937; Federal Housing Administration, *Akron, Ohio*, 129, 157.

[34] Summit County manuscript election returns, Nov. 1936, Nov. 1937; Jones, *Life, Liberty, and Property*, 379. For Jones's method, see *ibid.*, 357–77. The correlation coefficients indicate strength of association between variables. A more direct estimate of behavior, the ecological regression, was unsuitable for most of the occupational groups because of dispersed housing patterns. For example, only 7 precincts had more than 15 percent professionals, only 11 had more than 15 percent small business proprietors and only 7 had more than 15 percent craft workers. Only clerical and factory employees were highly concentrated. See also J. Morgan Kousser, "Ecological Regression and the Analysis of Past Politics," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 4 (Autumn 1973), 237–62.

[35] Jones, *Life, Liberty, and Property*, 196–207, 225–35. CIO unions had some success in organizing clerical and service workers. For the nation, see Jürgen Kocka, *White Collar Workers in America, 1890–1940: A Social-Political History in International Perspective* (London, 1980), 193–250.

TABLE 2
Akron Occupational Groups

Occupations	Pearson Correlation Coefficients of Support for Patterson Candidacy, 1937	Percentage Opposed to Corporate Property Rights, 1938–1939
Professionals	−.747	36.0
Big-Business Executives	N.A.	00.0
Small-Business Operators	−.284	52.0
Clerical/Service Workers	−.598	27.0
Craft Workers	−.113	76.0[c]
Factory Workers	.700	69.0
CIO	.518[a]	84.0
Firestone	.449	N.A.
Goodrich	.422	N.A.
Goodyear	.219	N.A.
Nonunion	−.626[b]	40.0
Unskilled (Laborers, etc.)	.451	74.0[d]
Unemployed	.411	64.0
r = .783		

Sources: Summit County manuscript election returns, Nov. 1937 (Board of Elections, Akron, Ohio); Burch Directory Company, *Akron, Barberton and Cuyahoga Falls Official City Directory, 1937* (Akron, 1936); Alfred Winslow Jones, *Life, Liberty, and Property: A Story of Conflict and a Measurement of Conflicting Rights* (Philadelphia, 1941), 379.

Note: Occupational data was correlated with precinct-level returns for 1937, based on a fifty-precinct sample. All coefficients are significant at the .05 level except Craft Workers (.21) and Goodyear (.07). The Nonunion coefficient applies to all Goodyear workers who lived in Goodyear Heights, a measure that overstates the number of non-CIO workers but probably understates their support for Lee D. Schroy. The correlation coefficient for Goodyear rises from .219 to .319 when the Goodyear Heights precincts are omitted. The percentages reflect the proportion of respondents whose scores ranged from 0 to 11. Professionals are defined as Alfred Winslow Jones's Technicians, Teachers, and Ministers; Factory Workers as Employees Association, Non-CIO, and CIO; Nonunion as Employees Association and Non-CIO; Unskilled as Works Progress Administration, Manual; Unemployed as all Works Progress Administration. Because Jones's numbers are ordinal, percentages are indicated rather than means, which Jones used.

[a] Firestone and Goodrich workers.
[b] Goodyear workers living in Goodyear Heights.
[c] Members of the AFL.
[d] WPA manual workers.

workers, Goodyear employees who were former Goodyear Industrial Assembly activists, is hardly surprising.[36] The intense, often violent conflict between URW and anti-URW militants in the Goodyear plant had long since foreclosed any possibility of cooperation between them. The suggestion that many craft

[36] Non-CIO rubber workers were concentrated in the Goodyear Heights area, a company-sponsored residential development of the World War I era. Their number is uncertain, but 3,193 Goodyear workers voted against the CIO in a National Labor Relations Board election on August 24, 1937. *Akron Beacon Journal*, Aug. 25, 1937, p. 1.

workers, including AFL members, supported Schroy emphasizes both the disruptive character of the AFL-CIO conflict and Davey's ability to wean construction workers and possibly others from the Patterson camp. The figures indicate that their alienation did not extend to fundamentals, but even modest defections could jeopardize the success of a political campaign dependent on the labor vote.[37]

The Patterson campaign thus lost the support of many individuals who had voted for Roosevelt in 1936. That decline was due in part to developments beyond Patterson's control. Despite his platform manner he was not Roosevelt and could not exploit the aura of the presidency. Like many Democratic candidates after 1936, he also suffered from public disillusionment with the New Deal. The strikes, sit-downs, and labor upheavals, the onset of recession, and the president's effort to "pack" the United States Supreme Court created a different and more difficult atmosphere for New Deal candidates after 1936. But Patterson was hardly a victim of circumstances. By eschewing appeals to white-collar workers and others who had supported Roosevelt, he and his advisers made their success dependent on a unified labor vote. This tie exposed a second miscalculation, their assumption that the union vote could be mobilized en masse for union candidates. The AFL-CIO conflict ought to have alerted them to the dangers of that course. Yet the fundamental problem was not at the federation or international union level. The margin of Patterson's defeat is almost unimaginable in the face of a united CIO. In the end the rubber workers were the key to the outcome of the election, but their role spelled defeat and frustration for the unions and the CIO strategy.[38]

A closer examination of the CIO vote illuminates the flaw in the Patterson campaign. Factory workers, including employees at other manufacturing firms organized by CIO unions, are strongly associated with support for Patterson (see table 2). It is precisely the relationship that union leaders expected. But the impression of union cohesiveness begins to fade when the plant, or the local union, is the unit of analysis. In particular, there appears to have been a difference between Goodrich and Firestone workers on the one hand and Goodyear workers on the other, a difference that even the most generous definitions of the anti-CIO element at Goodyear does not eradicate. A more direct estimate of voting behavior, based on the precincts with the largest concentrations of Firestone and Goodyear employees, confirms the distinction. Goodyear factionalism, it appears, offset Firestone and Goodrich cohesiveness, leaving Democrats in command of the labor vote but far short of victory.[39]

[37] Jones, *Life, Liberty, and Property*, 379.

[38] Gavin Wright, "The Political Economy of New Deal Spending: An Econometric Analysis," *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 56 (Dec. 1974), 34–37; Richard Jensen, "The Last Party System: Decay of Consensus, 1932–1978," typescript, 1981 (in Nelson's possession).

[39] *Summit County Labor News*, Nov. 5, 1937, pp. 1, 4; Summit County manuscript election returns, Nov. 1937. Ecological regression estimates, based on the 15 precincts with the highest concentrations of Goodyear and Firestone workers suggest that 41 percent of Goodyear workers and 95 percent of Firestone workers voted for Patterson. Compared to local Democratic candidates in 1934 and 1936, Patterson received 81 percent of the "normal" Democratic vote in the Goodyear

Why would Firestone workers behave differently from Goodyear workers? The power and presumed unity of the CIO forces was, after all, the central issue of the campaign, the preoccupation of both camps. Neither union records and newspaper reports nor the reminiscences of union veterans provide answers to this question. Indeed, they suggest a misleading pattern. Goodyear unionists were the most visible of the URW activists. They sparked the sit-down movement and were responsible for most of the work stoppages. Levinson had them in mind when he wrote of "labor on the march." Goodyear union leaders were active in the Patterson campaign, and two Goodyear union officers were elected to the city council, the only two CIO members among the Democratic candidates to survive the Patterson debacle. It would not be unreasonable to assume that the Goodyear unionists went to the polls united in their determination to elect a labor mayor. The Firestone local, on the other hand, received little public notice, was responsible for few sit-downs, and despite its contract victory was viewed by militant unionists as the most "conservative" of the Big Three locals. A careful reading of the documents might reasonably suggest that the Firestone workers would be less enthusiastic toward Patterson's candidacy than would Goodyear unionists. If there were serious defections, they could likely be in the Firestone precincts.[40]

In fact, the election returns suggest a contrary pattern. The Goodyear workers seem to have been little more united than Akron Democrats generally, whereas Firestone workers conformed to the anticipated Goodyear model. This pattern in turn suggests a different reading of the documents. In 1936–1937 Goodyear militancy was a sign of union dissension and weakness; Firestone quiescence, an indication of union strength. Militancy and union power were inversely correlated. The experiences of these two groups, so near and yet so far apart, reflected the fragmenting as well as the unifying impact of the depression. By curbing interplant mobility, economic conditions increased the importance of specific working conditions and labor-management relationships. In the 1910s and 1920s, the peculiarities of a particular plant had relatively little effect on the workers' outlook; in the 1930s they had a substantial, in some instances a decisive, impact. At Goodyear the company's ambitious personnel program had created and the depression had preserved a corps of loyalists who sustained the Goodyear Industrial Assembly and who were responsible for the upheavals of the 1930s. Goodyear militancy was as much a reaction to them as it was an expression of union sentiment. The

precincts but 164 percent of the Democratic vote in the Firestone precincts. The anti-CIO Goodyear Heights militants helped account for the unusually low Goodyear estimates. Goodrich workers and other CIO members were much more widely dispersed, making direct estimates of their voting behavior less reliable. *Ibid.*, Nov. 1934, Nov. 1936, Nov. 1937.

[40] Minutes of Executive Board, Minutes of Membership Meetings, 1933–1937, Local 2 Records (United Rubber Workers Local 2 Offices, Akron, Ohio); House interview; Turner interview; Charles Skinner interview by Nelson, April 23, 1976, tape recording (American History Research Center); O. H. Bosley interview by Nelson, Oct. 23, 1973, tape recording, *ibid.*; Walter Kriebel interview by Nelson, Sept. 19, 1972, tape recording, *ibid.*; John D. House, "History of the United Rubber Workers of America," microfilm, 1981 (Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio); Levinson, *Labor on the March*, 143–46; Nelson, "Origins of the Sit-Down Era," 212–22.

Firestone personnel program, which was equally advanced except for the omission of a company union (until 1933), had the opposite effect in the 1930s. Depression conditions made Firestone workers union zealots but zealots with a single antagonist. And their antagonist, the Firestone management, was known for its liberal policies. The 1937 strike marked the apogee of both Firestone solidarity and Firestone "conservatism." In November 1937 Firestone unionists boosted Patterson's candidacy with greater élan than did any other CIO group.[41]

This pattern also helps explain the behavior of workers at Goodrich and possibly at the smaller plants. The Goodrich local occupied an intermediate niche between the extremes represented by Goodyear and Firestone. It was vocal and active on the one hand, united and relatively free of dissent on the other. It enjoyed a generally harmonious relationship with the Goodrich management at the time of the election and was beginning to bargain seriously for a contract, an objective that it realized in 1938. Goodrich workers seem to have backed Patterson with little dissent.[42]

Although the evidence is suggestive rather than conclusive, the behavior of CIO members in Akron lends support to several important hypotheses about the 1930s. First, it buttresses the arguments of historians who have found a negative or at best a neutral relationship between militancy and organization. In Akron rank-and-file militancy was a particularistic response to specific circumstances. In its most virulent forms, it was anti-union as well as anti-management, an indication of the absence of a shared outlook rather than an expression of worker unity in opposition to a common opponent. It played a major role in altering the industrial and the political environments, but Levinson's metaphor notwithstanding, it was not a synonym for union power. Second, the Akron experience confirms the critical role of the local union in the evolution of the labor movement. The URW was probably more decentralized than most CIO unions, but even URW leaders did not appreciate the extent to which their organization diverged at the local level. Employees who worked and lived in proximity to one another and under nearly identical circumstances viewed the union and its claims differently. The social milieus of the plant and the local union were the keys to their perspective. The character of the labor force, employer-employee relations, local union leadership, and small-group dynamics overshadowed most or all external forces, including the efforts of URW International and CIO leaders.[43]

[41] Firestone unity declined in 1938, in part because the major goals of the workers seemed to have been achieved and in part because recession layoffs broke up the close-knit group that had guided the union in earlier years. Donald Anthony, "Rubber Products," in *How Collective Bargaining Works: A Survey of Experience in Leading American Industries*, ed. Harry A. Millis (New York, 1942), 653–54.

[42] Roberts, *Rubber Workers*, 161–69; T. G. Graham to J. S. Knight, March 16, 1938, and accompanying documents, file 199/1326, Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service Papers; "Meetings with Management, 1938," Local 5 Records (United Rubber Workers Local 5 Offices, Akron, Ohio).

[43] See especially Zieger, "Limits of Militancy," 638–57; Friedlander, *Emergence of a UAW Local*, 93–131; and Robert H. Zieger, *Madison's Battery Workers, 1934–1952: A History of Federal Labor Union 19587* (Ithaca, 1977), 49–57.

The election returns also suggest the enthusiasm of the unemployed for Patterson (see table 2).[44] On the basis of public statements and campaign issues, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the jobless might have supported Schroy, who promised a healthier local economy and more jobs. Like the small-business operators and clerical workers, the poor might have bet on economic growth. But powerful forces militated against that course. The Democratic machine had been based in the center-city slum wards, and patronage and tradition may have created bonds that transcended campaign appeals. There were also good reasons to discount Schroy's statements. His previous term coincided with a revival of the local economy that had led to the reemployment of factory workers but to no increase in local spending for public works or relief. One of the mayor's more accurate claims was that he had alleviated the city's financial plight by carefully husbanding public funds. That appealed to property owners, including many rubber workers, but was unlikely to endear him to the unemployed. In 1937 the city's frugality precipitated a series of public-relief crises that severely restricted payments to unemployables who did not qualify for federal aid. Cutbacks in WPA projects after the 1936 election exacerbated the problem. Despite a rapidly spiraling unemployment rate in 1937, Schroy was unable to secure more WPA jobs. Finally, prodded by the unions, the mayor endorsed a property tax increase to finance relief expenses. The proposal appeared on the 1937 ballot and was overwhelmingly defeated. In the meantime the plight of the poor worsened. It is hardly surprising that Patterson's early calls for expanded public services, slum clearance, and housing relief struck a responsive chord among them. Despite the Democrats' reticence during the general election campaign, the Poe-Bliss strategy sustained the impression that Patterson would be a big spender. In November the unemployed opted for public services rather than for economic growth.[45]

The behavior of the poor further underlines the lost opportunities of the Patterson campaign. As already noted, economic status strongly influenced voting behavior (see table 1). Patterson could have mobilized victims of the depression—the small-business operators, clerical workers, craft workers, factory workers, laborers, and unemployed workers of all types. By devoting more attention to public services and less to union power, he might have sustained the New Deal coalition of 1936. His approach, however, encouraged

[44] It is impossible to determine from the city directory whether unemployed persons were temporarily jobless due to layoffs (and eligible or even employed on WPA projects) or unemployable. My estimate is that most of the unemployed in the sample were unemployable and therefore dependent on municipal relief. Burch Directory Company, *Akron, Barberton and Cuyahoga Falls Official City Directory, 1937*. For a valuable overview of the unemployment and relief problem in the 1930s, see James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle against Poverty, 1900–1980* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 37–77.

[45] *Akron Beacon Journal*, Feb. 23, 1937, pp. 1, 6; *ibid.*, May 25, 1937, p. 21; *ibid.*, June 29, 1937, p. 27; *ibid.*, July 1, 1937, p. 1; *ibid.*, July 2, 1937, p. 48; *ibid.*, July 26, 1937, p. 13; *ibid.*, July 27, 1937, p. 1; *ibid.*, Aug. 18, 1937, p. 17; *ibid.*, Aug. 21, 1937, p. 2; *ibid.*, Oct. 23, 1937, p. 4; *ibid.*, Oct. 29, 1937, p. 29; *ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1937, pp. 1, 8; *ibid.*, Nov. 27, 1937, pp. 1, 10. By 1937 Akron's financial condition was excellent. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Financial Statistics of Cities Having a Population of Over 100,000, 1936* (Washington, 1938), 53, 72, 173.

middle-class voters, including many union members, to support the incumbent. Much the same pattern was evident elsewhere. In New York, where La Guardia transcended his labor base, the union forces won a landslide victory. In Detroit, where the CIO candidates behaved more like Patterson, they lost.[46] Although it is impossible to generalize about the behavior of specific groups, campaigns that had depended largely or solely on the union vote fared poorly.

Thus the 1937 Akron mayoralty contest confirmed the city's "test tube" reputation. Coming at the height of CIO power and expectations, it reflected the euphoria of the industrial union movement in the critical months between Roosevelt's reelection and the onset of the recession of 1937. To union leaders all things seemed possible; union power was sufficient to achieve union ends. In industry labor would speak with new confidence and authority; in politics it could eschew alliances and disregard potential supporters. The unionists' sense of omnipotence undoubtedly helped account for the ambitious, even reckless strategy of the CIO partisans in the Akron contest. Whether a shrewder assessment would have altered the outcome in 1937 cannot be known. What is clear is that Patterson's defeat had a sobering effect. The Akron results, coupled with other indicators of the isolation of the CIO and the disunity of the industrial unions, dashed the hopes of CIO leaders for a separate, possibly independent CIO presence in American politics and introduced a new realism into labor circles. In subsequent years the CIO was politically active but primarily as part of a coalition that supported Democratic candidates.[47] The prospect of a union government in a union city had proved to be a chimera. Union power, possibly decisive in the operation of industry, could be effective outside the plant only if carefully and wisely applied.

But the lessons of the Akron election were not confined to politics. The Patterson campaign provided a rare view of the grass-roots thrust behind the industrial union movement at its peak and of the reasons why that thrust would fail to confirm the hopes and the fears of contemporary observers. The illusion of extending labor power from the union hall to city hall was based in turn on the illusion of a monolithic CIO. Akron unionists, who more than most industrial workers might have been expected to conform to that image, nevertheless defied it. Despite their enthusiasm for the URW, they remained complex and unpredictable individuals. The CIO buttons that "sprouted on overalls, shirtwaists, and workers' hats and caps" may have signified a "new independence" from managerial authoritarianism, but they implied no decline in the traditional independence from dictation or manipulation that had been a hallmark of denizens of American industry. CIO members, like other workers, continued to defy precise categorization. In the late 1930s that meant that the CIO's reach often exceeded its grasp and that the industrial union potential substantially exceeded the unions' performance. Labor marched between 1936 and 1938 but seldom in the neat rows and columns that the John L. Lewises and Garnet Pattersons of that era would have preferred.

[46] *New York Times*, Nov. 3, 1937, p. 1; Lovin, "CIO Innovators," 238.

[47] Dubofsky and Van Tyne, *John L. Lewis*, 327–29; Lovin, "Persistence of Third Party Dreams," 153–56; Foster, *Union Politic*, 6–9; Brody, "Uses of Power II," 215–55.