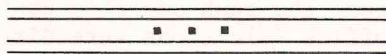


ship necessary to accommodate its growing size and power. The bureaucratization of the ITU is an interesting and complicated development similar to the one described by Peter Friedlander in his book The Emergence of a UAW Local, 1936-1939 (Pittsburgh, 1976). Initially, Friedlander writes of the local's bureaucracy, "it was not a structure external to the drive for organization, but was rather the formalization and institutionalization of that very drive itself." (p. 96) In Woonsocket, the institutional separation of leaders from the rank and file only became politically significant once the ITU had emerged as a major union and its officialdom found itself "courted" by labor (CIO), industrial and state powers in Rhode Island. No doubt the death of Joseph Schmetz (the chief Belgian cadre) in 1943, the departure of Lawrence Spitz for the army in the same year and their replacement by rank and filers affected the union. But it was the coincidence of this change with two others--the recognition received by the ITU and the advent of war--that insured the union's political transformation.

10. ITU News, 2 January 1947.



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Work and Community in Saylesville

Kate Dunnigan
Richard Quinney

"Rhode Island being the birthplace of cotton manufacturing in America, it is only natural that it should likewise lead the way in the development of the bleaching, dyeing and finishing of cotton goods." "The industry owes much," as The Book of Rhode Island expressed it, to the company that became the Sayles Finishing Plants, Inc. The first and major plant of the company was established in 1847 along the Moshassuck River, adjacent to Central Falls, in the area that became known as Saylesville.

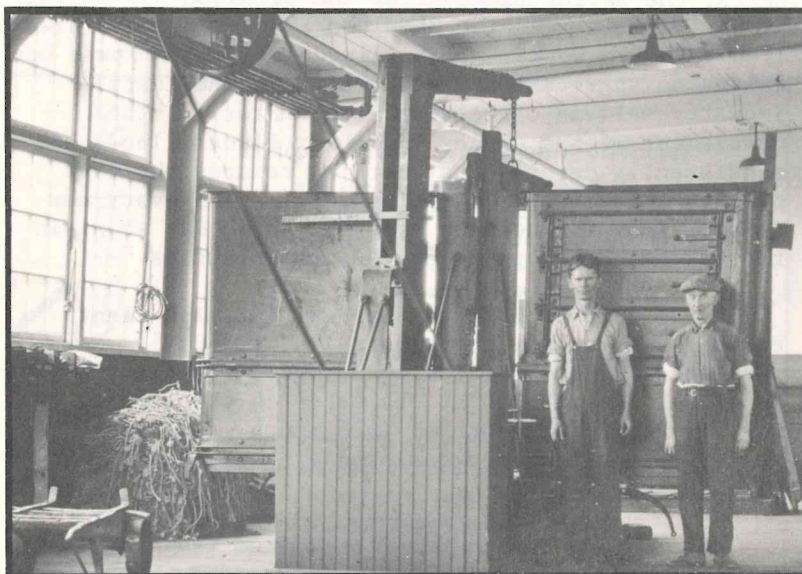
The first bleachery at Saylesville was equipped to bleach and finish muslins and shirtings. With the development of fine cotton goods and an advancing technology, the company rapidly expanded. By the turn of the century the company was operating four large units, the Sayles Bleacheries and Glenlyon Dye Works, at Saylesville, and the Glenlyon Print Works and Glenlyon Yarn Dye Works, at Phillipsdale. The company was making an appreciated contribution to the textile industry well into the twentieth century: "The management of the Sayles Finishing Plants, Inc., has consistently devoted its energies towards the increased consumption of cotton fabrics and every new demand finds the company prepared to do its share in the fullest development of its possibilities."

From 1918 to 1928 the Sayles Finishing Plants sponsored a company magazine called the Sayles News. Published "by and for the employees," the eight-page paper was distributed at the gates on the evening of the first and fifteenth of each month. "OBJECT: That we may become better acquainted with each other and with our work."

The Sayles News reported on a wide range of events in Saylesville, covering happenings within both the plant and the community. There was, in fact, little distinction between the community and the workplace. Reports ranged from the scores of the company bowling and baseball teams to the visits of Santa Claus at the Sunday School of the Sayles Memorial Church, from a story about the main office beach party to the first ice skating of the season on Bleachery Pond, from the

parent-teacher meeting at the Saylesville public school to the amateur boxing match of Paddy Owens, who was described as "the popular young clerk in D5E1." Reading the Sayles News today, one still senses the integration of life and work--a relationship, with tensions and contradictions, that nevertheless had supports and rewards for the workers and their families. For the Sayles Finishing Plants, the twice monthly paper placed everyone within the company "family."

The very readable format of the Sayles News was enhanced by the use of photographs and an occasional cartoon. The photographs were made by photographers employed by the Sayles company. The collection of negatives, numbering over 1500, is now held by the Rhode Island Historical Society Library. The Rhode Island Oral History Project at the University of Rhode Island includes a number of interviews with people who lived and worked in Saylesville during the 1920's and 1930's. These interviews reinforce the sense of community integration and cohesiveness which provided strong support to worker organization and solidarity in the strike of 1934.



The packing room of Plant E

"Oh, yes, they paid good money and it was a nice place to work. I enjoyed it. As far as we were concerned, my father, my brother, my sister, and I, we were well satisfied working at Sayles."

— (Former bundler, Sayles Finishing Plant)



The double and roll section,
Plant C of the Sayles
Finishing Plants

"I liked Sayles alright. I wasn't really very hard to work there. Everybody seemed to get along alright and there was no trouble with the foreman or anything like that. I think people got along better, no push this, do this, do that. If you bowed out for a couple of minutes, it didn't make any difference. Much slower."

— (Former timekeeper, Sayles Finishing Plant)



Lunch club chef
and assistant,
Glenlyon Print
Works

"Oh, we had a nice cafeteria. We used to go there an hour for dinner and they gave us food for 25¢ a meal and they give us vegetables and dessert. Oh, we used to run there for dinner, especially corn beef and cabbage!"

- (Former sewer, Sayles Finishing Plant)



Noontime baseball played by the women employees

"It was every Saturday afternoon they used to have the ball games. They'd all come out and watch the game. It was only a couple of cents to go and they had bleachers and everything down there."

- (Former bundler, Sayles Finishing Plant)



Seventh Annual
Employees'
Outing,
Rocky Point,
R.I., 1922

"There were nice Portuguese girls. We had redheads, Irish, you know ... all nice girls, Polish girls, and we all got along."

- (Former mangle operator, Sayles Finishing Plant)

"We had the best times with the people we worked with."

- (Former bundler, Sayles Finishing Plant)



The annual outing of the superintendents and foremen,
June 1923

"And, of course, we had a very close familiarity there. I think I knew everybody's name in the whole plant. And I'd know if they had any family troubles or anything of that kind. As I'd walk around the plant, I'd get all the information about everybody."

- (Former plant manager, Sayles Finishing Plant)



Saylesville Cooperative Association Store

"They'd go along, they'd keep a ledger on this family, how much money they make a week, they had their own farms, the company had their own farms, their own country store, coal. So if you made \$9.00 by the time you got through you'd probably owe the company money."

(Former dyer, Glenlyon Mill, Phillipsdale)



Memorial Day Parade, 1927

"You must remember people from my generation, Sunday in the park, the band beating out 'The American Patrol'. You went to school Memorial Day, Veterans of the Civil War came and talked to you. The flag, the government, especially the federal government, this was, you'd die in the street, gladly. You believed all these things, these things without sin, the flag could have been lily white, no spots on it. And this is what you were taught."

(Former National Guardsman, Central Falls)



Sayles News, April 1, 1928

By 1934 workers were ready to strike for their demands-- the thirty-hour week for forty hours pay; an end to the stretch-out; recognition of the union; and rehiring of the thousands fired for union activity. The national

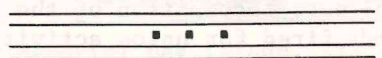
strike began on Labor Day, September 3, 1934, when 65,000 workers walked out. Two days later 325,000 were on strike from Massachusetts to Georgia. Strike activity began in Saylesville on September 7. By the time the strike ended late in the month, National Guard and State Troopers had battled crowds of up to 5,000. When the government with the support of the UTW leadership ordered strikers back to work, thousands were left unemployed as the millowners refused to rehire the strikers.

For the workers and families of Saylesville, as in hundreds of other mill villages, the struggle continued every day in a thousand ways. The people of Saylesville could no longer support the company as benefactor or participate in the company-sponsored institutions which once provided the fabric for life in the community. New patterns, based on a changed consciousness, had to be developed. The strike of 1934 marks a significant point in lives that are being lived today.



"Scared, any man who says he's not scared is a god-damned liar or he's crazy. But something makes you brave. I don't know what it is."

(Former yardman, Sayles Bleachery Plant)



"We Want Integrity": an Interview with Al Sisti

(Note: this is a transcription of an interview of Al Sisti by Duane Clinker, Scott Molloy and Paul Buhle. The order has been altered.)



Al Sisti

Q: I guess we can start with the Trade Union lessons you've learned.

A: I started to work at Atlantic Mills when I was thirteen. I knew nothing about a union at that age. You don't go through personnel, you don't sign anything, you just hang your coat on a nail and go to work. This was a mule-spinning department. I joined the union because my uncle told me to join the union. He was a spin-